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THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER  
" OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The School of Theology at Claremont

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
Doctor of Religion

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by  
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## CHAPTER I

### LOVE IN THE THOUGHT OF ERICH FROMM

The classical definition of humanism comes from the Greco-Roman tradition. This tradition holds the view that man because of his spirit is capable of forming his own life in freedom. With this freedom, man can adjust himself to the world, and through culture the world can become his home. Erich Fromm would not contradict this basic definition. He defines humanism as "the belief in the unity of the human race and man's potential to perfect himself by his own efforts." He also points out that humanists believe in man's potential perfection; however, they differ as to whether the grace of God is needed to bring such a perfection in man.<sup>1</sup> Fromm's thought leaves no room for divine grace.

Fromm begins his theory of love with an anthropology, which is also the basis for his ethics. He states that "man can only go forward by developing his reason, by finding a new harmony, a human one, instead of the prehuman

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<sup>1</sup>Roger Shinn, Man the New Humanism (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 174-176.

harmony which is irretrievably lost."<sup>2</sup> Basing his thought in a Spinozist pantheism, Fromm asserts that before man experienced human consciousness, he was unified with nature. Now, man lives in constant disequilibrium. He cannot set himself free from his mind; nor can he rid himself of his body as long as he is alive and his body makes him want to be alive. Consequently, all men face the fundamental question of how to overcome separateness, how to achieve union. The desire for interpersonal fusion is the most powerful striving in man.

Historically, men have used "God" to overcome being separate. Fromm does not believe that we deny the ideal of union by refusing to be subjected to a higher being. Such a denial is rather a strong affirmation of such an ideal in that it forces man to view his ideal from a realistic and honest perspective.<sup>3</sup> Man's true situation is hidden when he relates himself to God. Fromm's humanism places man ultimately in control of himself, and man's main goal is to

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<sup>2</sup>Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving (New York: Bantam, 1956), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941), p. 265.

find life (i.e. meaning) for himself. Fromm's understanding of man's situation is summed up in the title of one of his books, Man For Himself.

Even though man is for himself, there remains for all men a common nature. Fromm believes that today we have lost much positive thinking on human nature and "the essence of man," partly because we have become more skeptical about metaphysical and abstract terms like "the essence of man," but partly also because we have lost the experience of humanity which underlay the Buddhist, Judaeo-Christians, Spinozist, and Enlightenment concepts. Contemporary psychology or sociology often see man as a blank sheet of paper on which each culture writes its text. In contrast, Fromm turns to Karl Marx and uses him to say that man's behavior is comprehensible precisely because it is the behavior of "Man."

### Fromm and Marx

For many years, Paul Tillich was the only outstanding American philosopher or theologian to give any significant attention to Marx's use of alienation. However, once Marx's writings were translated into English, they were

edited and interpreted by Erich Fromm.<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly, this produced a humanism in Marx that was not unlike Fromm.<sup>5</sup>

Fromm recognized that Marx never developed a systematic psycho-pathology; however, Fromm believes Marx speaks of one form of "psychic crippledness" which to overcome is the goal of socialism. This "psychic crippledness" is alienation. Fromm believes that such an alienation is central for Marx and he develops his own position from this perspective.

Fromm interprets Marx's view of alienation in the following manner:

The essence of this concept . . . is that the world (Nature, things, others, and he himself) have become alien to man. He does not experience himself as the subject of his own acts as a thinking, feeling, loving person, but he experiences himself only in the things he has created, as the object of the externalized manifestations of his powers. He is in touch with himself only by surrendering himself to the products of his creation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man (New York: Ungar, 1961). In this work, Fromm interprets the thought of Karl Marx, and indicates his dependance upon Marx's thinking.

<sup>5</sup>Shinn, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>6</sup>Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962), p. 44.



Marx believes that alienation becomes a reality when man does not experience himself as in control (related) of the world, but that the world (i.e., nature, others, self) is unrelated to man and as objectified by man, even though much of the world which he objectifies is the result of his own creation. Fromm agrees with Marx whom he quotes as saying: "Alienation is essentially experiencing the World and Oneself passively, receptively, as the subject separated from the Object."<sup>7</sup>

In one summary, Marx holds that the existing industrial system "alienates from man his own body, external nature, his mental life and his human life."<sup>8</sup> Thus, "an inhuman power rules over everything."<sup>9</sup> Against this power, Marx seeks "the emancipation of humanity as a whole."<sup>10</sup> He looks for "a new emancipation of human powers and a new enrichment of the human being."<sup>11</sup>

Fromm gives a detailed analysis of how man's mastery over nature has brought the result of an increasing strength and confidence in the individual self, and yet, it

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<sup>7</sup>Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

has failed in maintaining control over the very forces that his confidence in his own ability has allowed him to create. As a result of man's inability to control his created world, he attempts to "placate" or "manipulate" the world in any way he knows how. In other words, man has made the world he has created his God. Even though man attempts to maintain the illusion that he controls the world, he is forced by that world to experience a very real sense of insignificance and powerlessness in relationship to it. This is a phenomenon that is not dissimilar from what primitive man consciously felt toward the gods.<sup>12</sup>

Alienation does not only affect man's relationship to his environment, but also his relationship to his fellow man which increases man's feeling of isolation and powerlessness. The relationship of one man to another loses its human quality. In a desperate attempt to be at home in the world, we use other men through manipulation for instrumentality. One of man's greatest hungers is for security, and as a result in social and personal relations the laws of the market become the rule. Therefore, when men do relate to each other, it is to use the other as a means to

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<sup>12</sup>Fromm, Escape From Freedom, pp. 117-118.

an end, both men believing that the other is instrumental to his goal.<sup>13</sup> There is no human relationship of one man to another. Man in seeking life destroys the only thing that Fromm believes can give it to him, spontaneous and loving relationship.

Alienation from one's own self is also a reality. Man not only uses others, but he sells himself, for the modern world has transformed man in a commodity.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the self is only as valuable as others believe it is. The self has no intrinsic value in our alienated society.

Fromm summarizes man's alienation from himself, from his fellowmen, and from nature when he writes:

He has been transformed into a commodity, experiences his life forces as an investment which must bring him the maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions. Human relations are essentially those alienated automatons, each basing his security on staying close to the herd, and not being different in thought, feeling or action. While everybody tries to be as close as possible to the rest, everybody remains utterly alone, pervaded by the deep sense of insecurity, anxiety and guilt which always results when human separateness cannot be overcome. Our civilization offers many palliatives which help people to be consciously unaware of this aloneness. .<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>14</sup>Fromm, The Art of Loving, p. 72.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

When one experiences being separate, anxiety is aroused. Man's doubt of not having what is now possessed is based upon man's separation from the whole of reality. When one is separated, he is cut off and unable to use any human powers because he is related to nothing. Therefore, to be separated means that one is helpless, it means that the world can invade him but he is unable to react.<sup>16</sup>

Man attempts to break out of this isolated situation, to give up separation and find self-relatedness. Man therefore leaves his freedom of asking and answering questions for himself, and finds a situation in which no further questions will be asked and which answers to his previous questions are authoritatively imposed on him. Fromm sees religion playing this role. To eliminate doubt, man surrenders his freedom to save his spiritual life. He "escapes from freedom" so that he can escape meaninglessness. Man is no longer lonely or in doubt, but meaning has been saved through the sacrifice of self.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p.

<sup>17</sup>Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), pp. 48-49.

Such a freedom Fromm calls a "negative freedom," because it is actually binding man. It is a security blanket for the man whose relationship to the world is distant and distrustful and whose "self" is constantly threatened. It is imperative that a man escape from such negative freedom if he is to live spontaneously (i.e. meaningfully).

### Fromm's Ethical Position

Spontaneous activity is the way to overcome the terror of aloneness, and yet not have to sacrifice the integrity of the self. When man spontaneously realizes "self" he unites himself with the world. "Love is the foremost component of such spontaneity." This is not a love in which one is totally dissolved into another. It is not the possession of another person. It is "love as spontaneous affirmation of others, as the union of the individual with others on the basis of the preservation of the individual self." Such love springs from the need to overcome being separate, not from care of the other for the other's sake. It is love that leads to oneness without

eliminating individuality. The pain of aloneness ends through man's spontaneous action.<sup>18</sup>

When one acts spontaneously he is embracing the world which results in a loss of alienation. The person who does embrace the world does not remain the same, he becomes stronger. He is no longer isolated, but he is part of a whole. He sees himself as having his rightful place in the world and his doubts concerning himself and the meaning of the world come to an end. Fromm believes all of man's doubt is the result of separateness; hence, when an individual is able to live not compulsively nor automatically but spontaneously, doubt disappears. As man becomes aware of himself as active and creative, he concludes that there is just one meaning to life--the act of living itself.<sup>19</sup>

Fromm calls this active and creative relatedness of man to his fellow-man, to himself and to nature, "productive orientation." In terms of "thought" this productive orientation is seen in grasping the world by reason. In the realm of "action," productive orientation is expressed

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<sup>18</sup>Fromm, Escape From Freedom, p. 261.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

in productive work. In the realm of "feeling," productive orientation is seen in love, "which is the experience of union with another person, with all men, and with nature under the condition of retaining one's sense of integrity and independence."<sup>20</sup>

For Fromm, productive love is the foremost component of spontaneous living and the answer to the problem of existence. Love is primarily giving, the practice of a human power in freedom. And in addition, productive love has four basic elements. The first is care, an active concern for the life and growth of that which we love. Secondly, love entails responsibility. A person must be able and ready to respond to needs in another. The third element involves respect. This is an awareness of the other's unique individuality, the concern that the other person should develop as he is. Finally, knowledge is necessary for the other elements. An objective knowledge of the self and the other is a prerequisite for the fullness of knowledge that lies in the act of love.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Erich Fromm, The Sane Society (New York: Rinehart, 1955), p. 32.

<sup>21</sup>Fromm, The Art of Loving, pp. 22-28.

Love is thus an attitude that determines a person's relatedness to the world as a whole. If a man is only able to love one person and no one else, then it cannot be said that the man loves regardless of how attached he becomes to one person. If a man is to say, "I love you," he must say, "I love in you all of humanity, all that is alive; I love in you also myself." Self love, in this sense, is not selfishness but its opposite. Selfishness is a greedy concern with oneself that "springs from and compensates for the lack of genuine love for oneself."<sup>22</sup>

Self-Love. Fromm, in Man for Himself, presents the thesis that men must first look for their own happiness, and that as a result of finding it, they may love others as a "phenomenon of abundance." Any authoritarian religion interferes with this process in that it confronts the self which is selfish with the "command" to love the neighbor. Thus, such a command contradicts human nature by placing against man's natural desires a moral command. Fromm argues well that love cannot just be a command to be obeyed. He believes that love must be a phenomenon of

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<sup>22</sup>Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 32.



abundance, and that anyone engrossed with his own security or prestige is not free to love.<sup>23</sup>

The main reason for Fromm's seeing a necessity for self-love in order to love one's neighbor is found in his underlying pantheism. He relies heavily on Spinoza for his philosophical background. Spinoza postulated a picture of the nature of man in terms of a "model of human nature." From this model, it is possible to determine and define the laws of human behavior and the human reaction that follows behavior. Man, and not just men of a given culture, can be understood as any other being in nature because man is one. The same laws are valid for all men regardless of their cultural background.<sup>24</sup>

In the Art of Loving, Fromm summarizes his own position: "In essence, all human beings are identical. We are all part of One; we are One."<sup>25</sup> The paradoxical character of human nature is that, even though we are all One,

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<sup>23</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, The Self and The Dramas of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 139.

<sup>24</sup>Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup>Fromm, The Art of Loving, p. 47.

every man is unique. And men are unique in the specific way they solve their problem of existence.<sup>26</sup>

Hence, Fromm believes that when a man experiences self-love he can do no other but love his neighbor. From his understanding of the commonality of all men, Fromm contends that man's primary obligation is to love his neighbor as a human being. It can only be a virtue for man to love himself, for he is also a human being.<sup>27</sup>

Because he places so much emphasis upon self-love, Fromm reacts strongly to Christianity which places a great deal of stress upon self-giving. The foundation from which he criticizes is his understanding of the psyche. He comes to the conclusion that Christian love is rooted in weakness rather than in strength. Such an understanding comes from Nietzsche whom Fromm quotes readily: "Your neighbor-love is your bad love of yourself. Ye floss unto your neighbor from yourself and would fain make a virtue thereof! But I fathom your unselfishness . . . You cannot stand yourselves

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<sup>26</sup>Erich Fromm, Man For Himself (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1947), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup>Paul Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 352.

and you do not love yourselves sufficiently."<sup>28</sup> In contrast, "true kindness, nobility, greatness of soul . . . does not give in order to take . . . does not want to excell by being kind."<sup>29</sup> "The one goeth to his neighbor because he seeketh himself, and the other because he would fain lose himself."<sup>30</sup> This entire concept is summarized beautifully by Fromm when he writes:

Love is a phenomenon of abundance; its premise is the strength of the individual who can give. Love is affirmation and productiveness. 'It seeketh to create what is loved!' To love another person is only a virtue if it springs from this inner strength, but it is a vice if it is the expression of the basic inability to be oneself.<sup>31</sup>

When one loves another from his inner abundance, Fromm does not feel that such a humanist will face the criticism of self-centeredness that is leveled at him by Paul Ramsey and others. Fromm defends his position by first showing that there are many and various reasons for

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 104. Ramsey quotes Nietzsche from "Thus Spake Zarathustra", I, xvi.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 104. Ramsey quotes Nietzsche from "The Will To Power", stanza 935.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 104. Ramsey quotes Nietzsche from "Zarathustra", I, xvi.

<sup>31</sup>Fromm, Man For Himself, p. 126.

giving love. An alienated individual will give, but he gives in order to receive in return. If he does not receive, he feels that he has been cheated. There are others who consider giving a virtue, but feel that they make a sacrifice when they give love. Because it is painful for them to give, they conclude that they should give. For such people, the norm that it is better to give than to receive is saying that it is of more value to suffer than to experience joy. But when an individual truly loves himself he is able to give out of abundance for his love is overflowing. For such a person, the very act of giving brings him personal strength, wealth and power. Giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation, but because within the act of giving spontaneous love is to be found the individual's expression of aliveness.<sup>32</sup> It is when one truly loves himself that it becomes possible to express such love and through that expression love others.

When one gives love to another, he enriches the person receiving the love, for the receiver's sense of aliveness is enhanced by the giver of love who is enhancing

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<sup>32</sup>Fromm, The Art of Loving, pp. 18-19.

his own aliveness. The giver of love is not giving in order to receive; however, in giving he does bring joy in living to his own life. Fromm believes that love alone can produce love, and impotency is the inability to produce love. This thought has been well expressed by Marx when he wrote:

Assume, man as man, and his relation to the world as a human one, and you can exchange love only for love, confidence for confidence, etc. If you wish to enjoy art, you must be an artistically trained person; if you wish to have influence on other people, you must be a person who has a really stimulating and furthering influence on other people. Every one of your relationships to man and to nature must be a definite expression of your real, individual life corresponding to the object of your will. If you love without calling forth love, that is, if your love as such does not produce love, if by means of an expression of life as a loving person you do not make of yourself a loving person, then your love is impotent, a misfortune.<sup>33</sup>

Fromm believes that it is only in love that giving does mean receiving. It is only in love that one can be united with what is otherwise an alienated world composed of others and oneself. It is love that enables man to escape from alienation as well as from the so-called freedoms that can also bind him.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-21.

Types of Love. The different types of love must be seen from the perspective of Fromm's underlying pantheism. From this philosophical standpoint, Fromm quite consistently states that love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person. It is an orientation of character which determines a person's relatedness to the world as a whole. If a person truly loves one person, he must love all persons. Love is not a higher power which descends upon man nor a duty imposed upon him. Rather it is a power by which he relates himself to the world and makes it truly his.<sup>34</sup>

Fromm discusses five types of love:

1. Brotherly love. This is the wish to further the life of any other human being. It is marked by a lack of exclusiveness and based on the pantheistic experience. Fromm states that the love of the helpless, poor and stranger is a beginning. Brotherly love begins to unfold in the love of those who serve no purpose to the one loving them.<sup>35</sup>

2. Motherly love. This is the love of unequals and its goal is separation. It makes the unequal believe

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<sup>34</sup>Fromm, Man For Himself, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup>Fromm, The Art of Loving, pp. 39-41.

that it was good to have been born and it instills a love for life. The relationship is by nature unequal in that one needs all the help and the other gives all the help. The mother wants nothing for herself and her love extends to all children, not merely her own. The goal of motherly love is for the child to no longer be dependent upon the mother. Fromm thinks that this is the most difficult type of love to attain.<sup>36</sup>

3. Erotic love. This is a craving for complete fusion, for union with one other person. By nature it is exclusive, yet it loves in the other person all of mankind. It is essentially an act of decision and excludes love for others only in the sense of full commitment in all aspects of life. The goal of erotic love is to experience the other in the essence of his/her being. The paradox of human nature is especially evident here. Fromm states: "Inasmuch as we are all one, we can love everybody in the same way in the sense of brotherly love. But inasmuch as we are all also different, erotic love requires certain

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 41-44.

specific, highly individual elements which exist between some people but not between all."<sup>37</sup>

4. Self-love. The central importance of self-love for Erich Fromm has already been discussed. It is clear that if true love encompasses the love of all men, the self must be included. Fromm says that self-love and selfishness are opposites. He claims that narcissistic persons are incapable of productive love. Infantile persons love because they are loved or need the other; mature persons are loved and need others because they love first.<sup>38</sup>

5. Love of God. According to Fromm, the concept of God is merely a historically-conditioned one. Since most men are still in an infantile stage of development, love of God, who stands for the most desirable good, springs from man's fundamental need to overcome his separateness. Fromm believes that in the West, the love of God is essentially a belief, a thought process. He illustrates this idea by the story of the men attempting to determine what an elephant is in the dark.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 47-48.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 48-53.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-63.



For Fromm, in the last analysis, a person's love is determined by the structure of the society in which he lives. The main condition for the achievement of love is the overcoming of one's narcissism which entails attaining humility, objectivity and reason. The primary requirement for emerging from narcissism is what Fromm calls rational faith. This is a conviction, rooted in personal experience, of the reliability of one's own or another's fundamental attitudes, concerns, love, etc. This faith extends to mankind on the whole where it is based "on the idea that the potentialities of man are such that given the proper conditions he will be capable of building a social order governed by the principles of equality, justice and love."<sup>40</sup>

This reflects Fromm's optimism toward human nature, an optimism which tends to overlook the darker side of man. My basic criticism of Erich Fromm's humanistic theory of love, aside from his pantheism, is that he mistakenly evaluates the status of man's nature. He echoes Pelagius and overemphasizes the goodness of man for himself. Dr. Rollo May criticizes a Frommesque naivete advocating a

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

"calisthenic healthymindness."<sup>41</sup> Daniel Day Williams observes that, while Fromm accuses Christianity of teaching a false understanding of the roots of evil, he never admits the temptations of freedom itself or the possibility of the spirit's self-corruption.<sup>42</sup> Fromm allows no place and sees no need for the work of divine grace. It is "man for himself."

Even so, the humanistic idea of love presents a serious challenge to Christian faith. Questions demand answers: Is there a love other than man's and if so, does it make any difference? Can the human loves fulfill themselves? Christian thinkers must discover how and where the human loves need and are transformed by agape so that they remain human and yet are fulfilled from beyond themselves.

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<sup>41</sup>Rollo May, Love and Will (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 145.

<sup>42</sup>Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and The Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 194.

## CHAPTER II

### LOVE IN THE BIBLICAL TRADITION

#### LOVE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

##### The Root '-h-b

The Hebrew people knew the love of God as the constitutive character of his relation to his people, his initial concern for man, his faithfulness to them in the midst of their wandering and suffering.<sup>1</sup> There are two expressions of the Hebrew root '-h-b, ahabah and chesed. Ahabah refers to the election-love of God, whereas chesed emphasizes love within a covenantal relation.

The root '-h-b is common in Hebrew, and is used of any and every kind of love, much as the English word "love" is used. It is a general word that by no means has exclusively religious connotations. The root occurs most frequently in describing human love to an object, e.g., love to a son (Genesis 22:2), man's love to woman wife (Genesis 29:20; Deuteronomy 21:15; I Samuel 1:5), or the figurative

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and The Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 19.

reference to the adulterous Judah (Jeremiah 2:25 or Ezekiel 16:37). The root is used to a lesser degree in describing an appetite, such as to speak of one's love for food, drink, wisdom, sleep, etc. The third most frequent use consists of contexts in which love to God is expressed (Exodus 20:6 or Deuteronomy 6:5). The least frequently occurring contexts are "lover, or friend" and "divine love to individual men, the people Israel, or to righteousness." It is important to note that the word is always used in relationship and never in isolation.<sup>2</sup>

The following examples will be helpful in expressing more fully the "secular" use of the root '-h-b. It can be used of inanimate things: food (Genesis 27:4--JE; Hosea 3:1), sleep (Proverbs 20:13), husbandry (II Chronicles 26:10). It can be used of wisdom (Proverbs 4:6), knowledge (Proverbs 12:1), the good (Amos 5:15), faithfulness and duty (Micah 6:8), loving evil (Micah 3:2) simplicity, i.e., the absence of a godly sense of wisdom (Proverbs 1:22), and the heavenly bodies as gods

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<sup>2</sup>Francis Brown (ed.) A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 12-13.

(Jeremiah 8:2). As indicated above, the root is normally used of persons, the proportion being about four to one so far as the verb is concerned, and always (33 times) when the noun is used. The total usage for both verbs and nouns is 247.<sup>3</sup> I agree with Norman Snaith in concluding that there is no significance in these proportions, and that it is natural for there to be a greater personal usage.

Continuing the secular, personal use, one sees that the root is used of man's love for man (Psalms 109:4,5), love of self (I Samuel 20:17), love of neighbor as self (Leviticus 19:34), for a son (Genesis 22:2--JE), of love of man for woman in the Song of Songs and elsewhere, of adulterous love (Hosea 2:7) and of sexual desire (II Samuel 13:4,15). Curiously, the word is never used of love of a wife for a husband or a child for a parent.<sup>4</sup>

There are two important conclusions concerning the meaning of the root 'h-b that can be made when speaking generally: (1) when used of loving persons, 'h-b is used of the attitude of a superior to an inferior; (2) when used

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<sup>3</sup>Norman H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (New York: Schocken, 1964), p. 130.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

of an inferior to a superior (rarely) it is a humble and dutiful love.<sup>5</sup>

Although '-h-b has a secular foundation, its religious usage is of great significance for the Hebrew-Christian tradition. The verb of the root is used 32 times to speak of God's love. Two of these refer to God's love for Jerusalem (Psalms 78:68, 87:2), seven speak of His love for righteousness, judgment, and so on, and twenty-three He is pictured loving Israel or particular individuals. The verb is used twenty-two times to speak of man's love to God, nineteen times it refers to man loving God's name, His law, precepts, and so on, and two times man is described as loving Jerusalem. The noun is used four times when speaking of God's love for His people, and it appears once in relationship to Jerusalem's love for God. To summarize, the root is used twenty-seven times of God loving man and twenty-four times of man loving God. The latter includes four cases of loving God's Name, and one reference of Jerusalem's love for God (Jeremiah 2:2). From the consideration of the secular use of the root, these proportions are not what would be expected. However, the cases

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

where the root is used of man's love for God are largely the result of the special and characteristic Deuteronomic use of the root.<sup>6</sup>

It should now be clear that the root '-h-b is almost always rendered "love." It is in Hosea where the term first refers to God's love. For this reason, Hosea will be discussed in detail when speaking of the two specific expressions of '-h-b, ahabah and chesed. Hosea uses the root to refer to God's love in three different ways. The first idea is that God loves whom He will. The second is that God continues to love Israel in spite of her continuing sin. Finally, Hosea speaks of Yahweh's relationship to individuals and not to the nation as a whole--"I will heal their backslidings: I will love them freely" (14:4). However, according to the previous verse, this will only take place when the Israelites turn to righteousness. Hosea says both that God loved Israel in her sin and that he "hated" the Israelites whom He would "love no more" (9:12). The somewhat illogical reasoning seems to be the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-134.

result of a writer who is broken-hearted.<sup>7</sup> It should be added that the above is not to suggest that the love of God for Israel even in her sin is only present in Hosea, for it appears in latter instances (e.g., Jeremiah 31:9).

### Divine Love

Ahabah (election-love). There is no general agreement concerning the precise definition of the term "election." However, it is almost universally believed that Yahweh's "choosing" Israel is phrased in a language not present earlier than Deuteronomy. Even though much of what the Deuteronomist says is implied in earlier traditions, there is as yet no evidence that Israel was ever said to be "chosen" by Yahweh before ca. 623 B.C. Unless some of the psalms will be successfully dated before Deuteronomy in the future, no source will likely be found that speaks of election-love in earlier times.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ryder Smith, The Bible Doctrine of Grace (London: Epworth Press, 1956), pp. 30-31.

<sup>8</sup>G. E. Mendenhall, "Election," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), III, 76-79.



The Deuteronomic tradition fits very well into the structure of Covenant forms of the Mosaic times. Deuteronomy 7:6ff is the classical passage. Here the choice of Israel is grounded in Yahweh's initiative, i.e., His love. We are told that Yahweh had chosen Israel of the nations on earth, as His peculiar people. There is strong emphasis showing that the choice is determined by the nature of Yahweh, and not because of any characteristics or excellence that Israel possessed. Yahweh's election-love is totally uninitiated love of a superior for an inferior.

However, Deuteronomy 7:6ff follows this statement with an oath which Yahweh swore to the fathers. Quell and Stauffer point out that "the legal guarantee given in the oath is the truly valuable and estimable feature, and the expression can thus become and be used as an exhortation to preceive from all this that Yahweh, the true God, is also the faithful God, who binds Himself by covenant to all those who for their part love Him and keep his commandments." In fact, Deuteronomy 7:13 indicates that Yahweh's love is a result of covenant faithfulness. The thought of love acquires a note of "Do ut des" which is not present in the prophets. The oath robs love of its most important

part, its freedom. The oath is dropped in Deuteronomy 10:14ff, and thus, Yahweh's love is not based on a covenant, and He is free to elect their seed after them.<sup>9</sup> Such freedom is more in keeping with the message of the love of God.

Hosea seems to be the first to emphasize love as the basic motif in Yahweh's dealings with His people. Although the Father-God idea is also seen in Isaiah (1:4; 30:1,9), it is Hosea who places the stress on the inner feelings of attraction rather than on the authority of Yahweh. Hosea sees the election as well as the covenant as spontaneous love of the acting God. The law is seen as an inadequate way of expressing how Yahweh is bound to his people, and therefore, Hosea draws a comparison of his love of an adultress with Yahweh's love of the children of Israel. Thus the official religion is gone and only the divine power of love sustains the existence of Israel. Hosea pulls down the structure of the covenant theory in

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order to lay bare its foundation in the love of God.

Israel has been elected or chosen by Yahweh.<sup>10</sup>

The act of choice on God's part is analogous to man's choice of a wife as in Hosea 3:1. Hosea also uses the image of the father-child relationship (11:1), where Yahweh calls Israel out of Egypt through an act of love. In fact, the act of the Exodus from Egypt, as the original act of election, is frequently seen as an act of love (cf. Exodus 15:13; Deuteronomy 4:37; 33:3; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 106:7; Hosea 11:4). However, the election of the patriarchs is seldom viewed as an act of election-love.<sup>11</sup>

Hosea believed that it was foolish for Israel to rely on anyone but Yahweh because she had been chosen through the election-love of Yahweh. That Yahweh had chosen Israel is the one fact of Israel's history that stands out for Hosea. This fact of Yahweh's election-love the prophet sees most clearly expressed in the Exodus.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>11</sup>Mendenhall, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>12</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1957), p. 243.

In emphasizing the central importance of the Exodus, Hosea remembered a whole series of events, including the flight from Egypt and the experiences in the wilderness. The God of Israel was thus known through the Exodus event: "I am Yahweh from the land of Egypt." (Hosea 12:9; 13:4-5) And for Hosea (and Israel), it became possible to understand what it meant to be chosen by the love of Yahweh through the remembering of this past event, for the election-love was the sign of Yahweh's decision to make Israel his people. Yahweh had called his son out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1), and He found Israel like grapes in the wilderness (Hosea 9:10). It is this decisive historical event (election-love) that is the basis of the relationship (covenantal-love) between Yahweh and his people.<sup>13</sup>

It should be mentioned that the above understanding of the Exodus is not in accord with the place of the Exodus as it is found in the Pentateuch. In the Pentateuch, the Exodus is the turning point in a great historical drama that begins with the promises to the patriarchs (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:13-16; 17:1-8; cf. 9:25-27) and ends with Israel's conquest of Canaan. In the Pentateuch, the Exodus

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

appears as the decisive battle of God in his contest with Israel's enemies. It is also seen as a demonstration of God's great power over nature. It is not used to show the love of God at any time. In Hosea, the Exodus is never associated with any promise given to the patriarchs. There is also nothing in Hosea to hint that the Exodus was a demonstration of power (only of love), and it is never even indirectly suggested that the conquest of Canaan was in any way the goal of the drama that was centered in the Exodus.<sup>14</sup> There is also an obvious amount of detail concerning the Exodus event missing in Hosea. However, this could be due to the fact that Hosea presupposed a knowledge of the event on the part of his listeners and that he did not need the detail to show God's salvation activity through election-love.

Unlike the Pentateuch, Hosea does not use the patriarchal traditions to illustrate God's redemptive activity, although in referring to Jacob in 12: 3-4, 12, he shows that he had some acquaintance with those traditions. Hosea, unlike those to the south of Israel, sees

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<sup>14</sup>James Ward, Hosea (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 199.

deliberate, divine activity (election-love) beginning with the Exodus-Wilderness traditions.

As we have seen, it is clear that Hosea views the history of Israel as a salvation history (i.e., founded in the election-love of the Exodus tradition). In fact, Hosea bases his whole message in such a salvation history (Hosea 1:4; 6:7; 9:9,10; 10:1,9,11f; 11:1-4; 12:4f,10,13f; 13:4-6).

It is impossible to see Yahweh's election-love without describing the role of Yahweh as one of Saviour (Psalms 106:21). For Hosea, Yahweh's activity as Saviour is outstanding and seems almost to constitute his character of being Yahweh. Hosea 13:4 says, "Yet, I am Yahweh thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me; for there is no Saviour beside me."

The memory of God's election-love and the deliverance (covenantal-love) was central in salvation history. Thus, Hosea stands totally in the stream of the Exodus tradition for his whole proclamation is rooted in this history of salvation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

God had the power to elect, because he was always seen as the superior; man was always the inferior. Therefore, God was in complete control of His election of Israel. He had the power to grant love or to take it away. The Old Testament holds solidly to this throughout. God is in heaven; man is on the earth.<sup>16</sup>

The Septuagint employed<sup>17</sup> the Greek word "agape" to stand for the Hebrew ahabah. The word, agape, is not used frequently in the Septuagint, only sixteen times, and it is always for the word, ahabah. In other instances where ahabah is translated into the Greek, it is represented by the verb "agapao" (one), the classical "agapesis" (seven), "euphrosune" 'joy' (one), and, to complete the list "philia" (five, all in Proverbs). Very few nouns for love occur often in the Old Testament, either in the Hebrew or in the Greek. Hebrew has very few abstract nouns, and even those normally appear very late. However, where there is

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<sup>16</sup>Snaith, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>17</sup>Did not invent "agape" as Snaith and others believe.

a noun for love, it is ahabah in the Hebrew, and agape in the Greek.<sup>18</sup>

Chesed (covenantal-love). The distinction between the love of election and covenant is a very narrow one. In fact, the two loves intermingle so that in a life situation it is impossible to separate them. The act of Yahweh's choice of Israel and the covenant between Yahweh and Israel are two aspects of the same relationship. The distinction is being made for the analytic purpose in making a distinction between the election of Israel and love which presupposes a covenant and operates within it. Covenant love is, therefore, the love which maintains a relationship already established. To "keep covenant and steadfast love," is the role of chesed. (cf. Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 5:10; 7:9,12; I Kings 8:23; Nehemiah 1:5; 9:32; Psalms 89:28; Daniel 9:4).<sup>19</sup>

The great majority of uses of chesed refer to God's relation to Israel or an Israelite, for "God and Israel" is

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<sup>18</sup>Snaith, op. cit., pp. 173-174.

<sup>19</sup>E. M. Good, "Love in the Old Testament," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), III, 167.



the main topic of the Old Testament. Although most usage of the word speaks of a covenant or implies a covenant, it should not be concluded that the term refers only to the covenantal love of Israel. When the chesed of God is named, it does not always refer to God's covenant love to Israel (e.g., Job 37:13), though "covenant" always implies chesed.<sup>20</sup>

Chesed is very closely related to the Hebrew understanding of God's justice (tsedeq). Tsedeq is related to human justice (mishpat) in that God's righteousness acting in judgment (tsedeq) is normative for mishpat. Thus, tsedeq refers to God's righteousness acting in judgment, while mishpat is formulated by judgments in courts of law and also seen in informal custom. In order to comprehend the profoundness of this concept of justice, it is necessary to distinguish between these two types and then relate them together. They must be related so that the meaning of God's righteousness acting in judgment (tsedeq) can become normative for human justice (mishpat).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>21</sup>Paul Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 4.

Norman Snaith has shown that the meaning of the righteous judgment of God (tsedeq) has been invaded by the "vocabulary of salvation." The eighth century prophets used the term in speaking of ethics, but there was some overlapping into the salvation sense of the term. By Second-Isaiah "tsedeq-tsedaqah" had come to mean "vindication" or even "salvation" and its use as "ethical righteousness" was now secondary.<sup>22</sup> It must now follow that if we are able to show that divine righteousness is determinative for human justice, then the meaning of human justice must by necessity be related to salvation. For God to show his righteousness means He is also showing His salvation for man.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the tsedeq of God borders on the meaning of chesed, which is a sure love, a covenantal love, and the chesed of God sets the standard for the measure of love men are to give the covenant, in the same way the tsedeq of God should be the measure of true justice for all human justice. Both of these examples show that the response man makes to God is important not

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<sup>22</sup>Snaith, op. cit., p. 87.

only to man, but also to God. There is communion and relationship in a covenantal partnership, and when one party ignores the covenant the other is hurt by it.

There are some early passages where God shows *chesed* to Israel, merely *qua* Israel, such as Exodus 15:13, but there is nearly always a reference to righteousness or something similar in the context. Psalms 89 which begins "I will sing the '*chasdim*' of the Lord forever," and the 23rd Psalm which ends, "surely goodness and *chesed* shall follow me all the days of my life," indicate that the Hebrew writers are faithful to God. Under the Temple refrain "For His *chesed* endureth forever," (Psalms 136, etc.) it is postulated that the worshippers are loyal. However, there are a few incidents where God's *chesed* continues even to the sinner. This is the promise to the house of David, even if it sins (II Samuel 7:15; Psalms 18:50). Deutero-Isaiah compares God's promise of *chesed* to Israel to His pledge to Noah and implies that the *chesed* will always continue (Isaiah 54:5-10; cf. Jeremiah 31:3).<sup>23</sup> I believe that this continuing and unending *chesed* of God

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<sup>23</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 12.

is most completely developed first by Hosea. However, it must be admitted that the predominant theme of the Prophets is that God shows chesed to the righteous and sometimes to those who desire to be righteous (Psalms 6:4; 25:7; 51:1; 130:7). The dominant idea of the Old Testament is that God shows chesed to the faithful Hebrew.

Hosea, in consistency with his foundation for election-love, bases his understanding of covenantal-love in the Exodus from Egypt. He sees the goal of such a covenant not in the following of specific laws, but rather the creation and development of a community relationship between Yahweh and man. Love is expressed in communion. Hosea's understanding of covenant is one which sees the covenant brought into being at the Exodus, before there are any detailed ceremonial laws for the community to follow. Thus, the love of God is not dependent upon man's response to the covenant. However, the covenant does need the response of man to be complete.

That this is Hosea's understanding of the covenantal relationship seems to be pointed to vividly in his description of his marriage to Gomer. Eichrodt agrees with such a position:

The application of this parable (the marriage of Hosea and Gomer), which the prophet acquired the right to use only at the price of his own heart's blood, brought out overwhelmingly the quite irrational power of love as the ultimate basis of the covenant relationship, and by means of the unique dialectic of the concept of love illuminated the whole complex of the nation's history. The depth and seriousness of Israel's faithlessness, which lay at the root of the people's alienation from God, and which merited the most terrible punishment; the inconceivable condescension of Yahweh and his fidelity to the faithless nation for transcending the categories of human thought; the stand which had to be taken within the nation against the anti-God forces of Nature worship, so corruptive a factor in the nation's history; all this was presented with heart-rending force in the conduct of the husband toward his faithless wife, whom he delivers up to punishment, yet strives to win back, seeking to touch her heart through the pleading of her children.<sup>24</sup>

By using the imagery of marriage, Hosea is showing that the relationship of law is irrelevant when placed in the light of a "living fellowship of love," in which one can do nothing but give total allegiance because of the experienced love of Yahweh. When the covenant is love, it is impossible to satisfy it or even to fulfill it by doing works of the law and fulfilling formal obligations. Also, when one recognizes that it was Yahweh's will to love a harlot, any thought that legal categories can be used to

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<sup>24</sup>Walther Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), I, 251.

express man's relationship to Yahweh is completely destroyed. However, this does not imply any sort of depreciation or elimination of the legal aspect of man's relationship to Yahweh, but it does show that it must be interpreted in relationship to the dominant and fundamental principle of love.<sup>25</sup>

Because of the analogy of Hosea's marriage, there may be a tendency to conclude that Hosea sees Yahweh's relationship to Israel in the context of erotic love. This is not the case. It is in referring to Israel's history<sup>26</sup> that Hosea eliminates any possibility of associating Yahweh's love to an erotic love.<sup>27</sup>

In his analogy of the marriage, Hosea is saying that Yahweh has married Israel at the time of the Exodus but that Israel has rejected the love contract. This

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., I, 252.

<sup>26</sup>Hosea 11:1; 12:10; 13:4, the 'God from the land of Egypt;' 13:5, the guiding through the wilderness; 4:6; 6:7; 13:1, the making of a covenant; 13:6, the conquest of Canaan; 4:6; 12:4, God's guidance through the prophets; 7:15; 11:7, the strengthening of the nation.

<sup>27</sup>Eichrodt, op. cit., I, 252.

concept of a marriage between a deity and man was not foreign to Hosea, but it certainly was to the Israelites at the time of the Exodus. Hosea was very familiar with such marriages because of the rites of the Canaanite nature religion (the marriage of Baal to earth is an example). However, it was an extremely radical and bold move on Hosea's part to transfer such an understanding from a religion completely incompatible with Yahwehism as Hosea understood it, to the traditional covenantal relationship with Yahweh. It should be noted, however, that the earthly partner who receives Yahweh's love and relationship was thought of in only historical terms which eliminates any possibility of a mythical element. It is interesting that the earthly partner is obscure, for Hosea sometimes speaks of the land (1:2; 2:5), and sometimes of Israel (2:16; 3:1,4) as the partner. In this we can see that Hosea's borrowed material has not been completely reduced to order, although Hosea does place his emphasis upon the nation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), II, 141.

Although the love of Yahweh is central and fundamental, it must not be overlooked that Yahweh is also a God of severity. Yahweh declares: "Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more." (Hosea 9:15) The election of Israel as an innocent bride is through (the honeymoon is over) for Israel's innocence was not long lasted after the Exodus. Yahweh reminds Israel of her evil acts in the past. He speaks of the outrages of Gibeah (9:9; 10:9f., cf. Judges 19-21) and the shame of Baal-peor (9:10, cf. Numbers 25:1-5). Yahweh does not remain unaffected by Israel's attitude towards Him, but is hurt deeply by the people disregarding His covenant-love.

In these cases and in others, we can see the wrath of God. In all cases, the wrath comes when the Israelites have forgotten their "knowledge of God" and have placed "other gods before Him." Hosea, realizing this causes Yahweh's anger, expressly brands as idolatry the cult of the golden bulls<sup>29</sup> which the first Jeroboam had instituted

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<sup>29</sup>Golden calf and Yahwehism are first related together in the wilderness by Aaron.



in the royal sanctuaries of the north (I Kings 12:25-30). Ancient Near Eastern history makes clear that the original intent of these golden images was not to mix the worship of Yahweh with that of other gods, but rather to connote the invisible presence of divinity, as the cherubim and the Ark in the Jerusalem temple did for Judah. The calves gave Yahweh a dwelling place in the north. However, the images were only idols to the people of Israel, all the more so since the bull, as a symbol of power and fertility, served to represent Baal in the Cult of Canaan.<sup>30</sup> It grew to such an extent that Israel came to believe that it was the Baals whom she had to thank for her prosperity. Israel "does not know that it was I (Yahweh) who gave the grain, the wine, and the oil, and lavished upon her silver and gold" (Hosea 2:10).

Even though Yahweh's anger is present, because of chesed, it still remains His purpose throughout to reconcile his faithless people unto Himself. Yahweh is unable to give up his love for Israel even though he was greatly angered by their turning to other gods (hosea 3:1). The

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<sup>30</sup>Bruce Vawter, The Conscience of Israel (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), p. 124.

quality of steadfastness in chesed is especially evident. The Northern Kingdom has to go through a period of discipline and quarantine "without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim" (Hosea 3:4). The deprivation would be in the areas of religion and politics which are the areas that had been corrupted by the Canaanite culture. Following this, there will be a new beginning, a new relationship; Israel will repent (i.e., return) to Yahweh.<sup>31</sup> The relationship that was present at the Exodus and in the wilderness will once again be a reality (Hosea 2:15).

Hosea, therefore, very definitely speaks of a new beginning, a new covenantal-love. The place where this new beginning will take place is significantly the wilderness. The long history of the broken covenant, which was first broken in the wilderness, would now be renewed in the wilderness. Israel will once again respond with the same trust and gratitude that she possessed at the time of the Exodus. Yahweh will restore Israel to the relationship of a wife, betrothing her to Himself in righteousness and steadfast love (chesed). The infidelity of Israel will be

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<sup>31</sup>Anderson, op. cit., p. 249.

conquered by a love of divine proportions, and she will "know" Yahweh in the re-established relationship (Hosea 2:19-20).

The prophet Jeremiah is in general agreement with Hosea. Hosea's simile of the youthful marriage vows can be seen in Jeremiah 4:19. Jeremiah also pleads for the erring wife to return (Jeremiah 3:12-15,20; cf. Hosea 11:8f and Jeremiah 4:19; cf. Hosea 11:2 and Jeremiah 31:20), and he also sees Yahweh as very reluctant to let His people go, even though they have not remained faithful to the covenant.<sup>32</sup> Amos, on the other hand, is certain that Israel will go into captivity for its sins (7:11,17; 5:27; 6:7). Except for a few exceptions, Amos believes there will be a complete doom of Israel. He makes little reference to the love that will save Israel.<sup>33</sup> Finally, Ezekiel sees most of Israel as doomed, but there will be a remnant that is righteous and thus will be saved.<sup>34</sup> There once again is no steadfast love without the righteousness of Israel, however.

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<sup>32</sup>Snaith, op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

Chesed, when used of God in the Septuagint, came to mean "mercy, loving kindness, pity," which is represented in the LXX by the Greek word "eleos." For chesed the LXX uses eleos over 170 times, while other terms are used only 42 times. Of these, "hosios" (pious, devout, an ethical piety) and its verb (29) are the most frequent. In the previous discussion of chesed, it was shown that while covenant always implies chesed, chesed does not necessarily imply covenant. The same is true with eleos.<sup>35</sup>

Conclusion. It is not the task in this writing to follow the idea of God's love throughout the Old Testament. However, the previous discussion does allow for a summary of the main features of God's love to be made. The following summary will organize the major features of God's love as understood by the Old Testament writers.

1. Its personal quality. The root '-h-b points beneath the covenant to the motive for God's election of His people which is in the innermost personal being of Yahweh. A major aspect of the mystery of his personality

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<sup>35</sup>Smith, op. cit., pp. 38-40.

is concerned with His love. In Hosea 11:9, the Old Testament is not far from saying that God is love.<sup>36</sup>

2. Its voluntariness. This must be seen in sharp contrast to the prevailing paganism of the day. Paganism bound a god to a particular people. The heathen gods did not possess the freedom to choose their peoples, but the relationship of a god and his people was a natural fact and it was inescapable for either party. Yahweh loves voluntarily, there is nothing that says He must love man (quite the contrary).<sup>37</sup>

3. Its spontaneity. Israel possesses no qualities or potentialities which stimulate the love of God. God's love has no cause prior to itself (Deuteronomy 7:7f). Such spontaneity, which is a mystery and a paradox (Deuteronomy 9:4ff; Ezekial 16), is often expressed in terms of the figure of a marriage. It is seen in a marriage that is in all respects senseless and grotesque (Hosea 1:2; 3:1). However, it must be said that the Old Testament also has an observable tendency to view the continuance of God's love

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<sup>36</sup>Alan Richardson, A Theological Word Book of The Bible (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 132.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

as conditioned by Israel's behaviour (e.g., Deuteronomy 5:10; Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 7:9-13). In some places, the possibility of regarding it as a reward for human merit arises.<sup>38</sup> But for Hosea and other later prophets, the love of God remains spontaneous regardless of the action of men. However, God's love relationship to man does change because of man's disobedience. A New Covenant is prophesied, through which the spontaneous love of God can be more adequately expressed.

4. Its covenantal. Though the love of God is undeserved, there is a sense in which it can be claimed for Yahweh has bound Himself to Israel through a covenant. He is bound because of His faithfulness to His oath (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:6ff). This is why *chesed* is so prominent in the Old Testament (cf. Leviticus 26:42; Exodus 2:24, 6:5; Ezekiel 16:60; Psalms 105:8,42; 106:45, etc.)<sup>39</sup>

5. It seeks moral fellowship. It is impossible to separate God's love from his righteousness. It is not a sentimental love. Earlier, the emphasis on "knowing" God in the book of Hosea was mentioned (cf. esp. 2:20,

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

4:6, 6:6, 13:4).<sup>40</sup> The love of God is not isolated, it is expressed in relationship and fellowship. Without righteous communion, the love of God is not known. To know God is to respond to Him in righteous loving fellowship.

6. Its exclusiveness. God's love demands that Israel give Him undivided allegiance (cf. Exodus 20:3-5; Deuteronomy 6:5).<sup>41</sup> This is the basis of the command to put no other Gods before Yahweh. Hosea tells us of Yahweh's anger and hurt because the people have given credit to the pagan gods for all that they have.

7. Its expression in judgment and forgiveness. Both judgment and forgiveness are responses to man's sin. God's punishment is not a contradiction of love; on the contrary, it is because of love that Yahweh took Israel's sin so seriously (e.g., Amos 3:2). There is in the love of God a willingness to hurt in order to save, to shatter false securities so that in the end the people might know true peace. God loves with steadfastness and earnestness and it can be severe. But Hosea and others show us that such severity must be coupled with tenderness if it is to

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

be correctly understood (Hosea 11:8; Isaiah 63:9, etc.). Where justice demands that Israel be destroyed, God refuses to do so (Hosea 11:9), and the reason for the refusal is to be found in the mystery of His Being--"for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee." (Isaiah 55:7f) But Israel refuses to repent, she is too far gone to respond to God's love. Therefore, the love of God must cause man to repent. God must work within the hearts of men (Jeremiah 31:33). Even though the Old Testament details the horror and hopelessness of man's sin, we are still left with the assurance that God's love which is the center of His Being will continue to be "everlasting" (Hosea 2:19; Jeremiah 31:3, 35ff; Isaiah 54:8).<sup>42</sup>

8. It is for individuals as well as for Israel. There is little said concerning God's love for individuals, though it seems to be implied throughout the Old Testament. It is unmistakably implied in some of the Psalms and in Deuteronomy it is also present by implication. "The stranger" in Deuteronomy 10:18 is collective, but the individual as a member of the class is definitely implied. There is a tendency to see God's favour as dependent upon

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.



an individual's goodness, and that goodness is rewarded by blessings and evil-doing by punishment (cf. John 9:2). Job is a monumental protest against such a misunderstanding of the nature of God's love.<sup>43</sup>

9. It is for other nations as well as for Israel. This understanding is not common; however, it is hinted and implied (e.g., Amos 9:7; Ruth), and in some places the implication is very clear (e.g., Isaiah 19:19-25; 42:1-6; 49:6; Jonah).

### Human Love

Man's love to God. As has been shown in the discussion of chesed, the covenant love of God is foundational to the divine-human relationship. If God had not established the covenant, it would have been impossible for man to know God and thus also impossible to love Him. Those responding to the covenant, that is "the faithful" are asked to "love Yahweh" (Psalms 31:23-24). Yahweh's faithfulness and care (Psalms 116:1) and His loving strength exerted on Israel's behalf (Psalms 18:1-2) motivated the love of man for God. The great commandment: "You shall

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5), is man's most profound response to Yahweh's oneness, his uniqueness, and his sole claim to man's devotion.<sup>44</sup>

After the Law of Moses was established, chesed came to refer to faithfulness to the strict laws that were enforced from the time of Ezra onwards. The Law of Moses was the norm of daily life for the post-exilic community. In the post-exilic period, the adjective "chasid" is used to describe the man who is faithful to the Law of Moses.<sup>45</sup> Chesed is used very infrequently when speaking of man's love to God.

Jeremiah only uses chesed once in this sense: "Thus saith the Lord, I remember for thee the chesed of thy youth, the love of thine expousals; how, thou wentest after men in the wilderness." (Jeremiah 2:2) There seem to be only two other Prophetic texts where Israel's love to God is called chesed (Hosea 6:4-6; Isaiah 57:1). Later on the plural was used when speaking of one's "good deeds" toward God (Nehemiah 13:14; II Chronicles 32:32, etc.). The term

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<sup>44</sup>Good, op. cit., p. 167.

<sup>45</sup>Snaith, op. cit., p. 123.

chesed is very limited when speaking of man's relationship to God, for man cannot show mercy to God.<sup>46</sup> This brings us to the term chasid.

It is generally agreed that this term denotes one who exercises chesed toward God rather than one who receives it from Him. In fact, there are only two places where chasid is used of God in referring to the persistent covenant-love which Hosea is the first to expound. The two cases are Jeremiah 3:12 and Psalms 145:17.<sup>47</sup>

In all remaining cases, chasid speaks of the loyalty of the faithful. This is what C. H. Dodd was emphasizing when he said that chesed means "pious dutifulness, piety" in the sense of the Latin "pietas."<sup>48</sup> I believe Grensted<sup>49</sup> is incorrect in suggesting to Dodd that the use of "chasidim" by the post-exilic Jews came through an assonance with the Greek "hosios." Chasid was used in the sense of pious obedience to the Law long before the Jews

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<sup>46</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>47</sup>Snaith, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>48</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Bible and the Greeks (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), p. 60f.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

used Greek. There had been, as Dodd suggests, a natural development of the word chasid in Hebrew.

In I Samuel 2:9, God's chasid (i.e., the man who keeps chesed) is placed in contrast with the wicked. In Proverbs 2:8, "the way of His chasid" is the same as "the paths of mishpat (justice)." Deuteronomy 33:8 speaks of the observance of the covenant and the teaching of mishpat. In two other places outside the Psalter, chasid is used: II Samuel 22:26 (parallel found in Psalms 18:26) and Micah 7:2. In both instances, the word is used in conjunction with the word "hashar" (upright). All other Old Testament usage of chasid is to be found in the Psalter.<sup>50</sup>

To speak of Israel's love of Yahweh is primarily to speak about "knowledge of God." It is from this knowledge that loyalty in true and proper worship comes, as well as the proper behaviour in respect to the humanitarian virtues. All the prophets expect these standards (Isaiah 1:16; Jeremiah 7:4-11, etc.).

Israel's worship must be seen as an expression from those who love Yahweh. This is a strongly presented thesis in the Psalms. Those who "love the name" of Yahweh

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<sup>50</sup>Snaith, op. cit., p. 124.

will dwell in the restored Zion (Psalms 69:36-37), and the impression is given that this dwelling is a continual ritual worship. The pious love Yahweh because they believe he answers prayer (Psalms 116:1). If one does love His name, he will participate in ritual exhaltation (Psalms 5:11). If one loves Yahweh, he will also love his temple which is "the place where (his) glory dwells." (Psalms 26:8) Even foreigners have the right to enter into joyous worship if they "join themselves to Yahweh, to minister to him, to love the name of Yahweh, and to be his servants." (Isaiah 56:6-7).

Israel's history also has much false worship because Israel often "loved" false gods. Jeremiah 8:2 says that Israel "loved strangers" and in the context this seems to refer to alien gods (Jeremiah 8:2). Hosea often accuses Israel as being a lover of the Baals (Hosea 2:13; 9:10). "And the indignant outcries of Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the author of Lamentations against Israel's seeking "lovers" among the nations carry the connotation of a departure from the exclusive and loving devotion to the worship of Yahweh, since political alliance in ancient times involved recognition of foreign deities (cf. Jeremiah

2:33; 3:1; 4:30; 22:20,22; 30:14; Lamentations 1:2, 19; Ezekiel 16:33, 36-37; 23:5, 9, 22; Hosea 2:12-14,8:9).<sup>51</sup>

Love to God also involves ethics for it is the moral life of man that Yahweh desires and not the legalistic following of external ritual (Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8). The ethical life takes place within the covenant. It is a life of love to Yahweh. To love Yahweh is to walk in his ways (Deuteronomy 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 30:16). God gives the Law as a gift of his love so that man may have a framework in which to order his devoted obedience. Thus, those who love Yahweh also keep the commandments (Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 5:10; 7:9; 11:1; Nehemiah 1:5; Daniel 9:4, etc.). Thus, the Psalmist can unceasingly tell of his love for Yahweh's law (Psalms 119:97, 113, 163-164), of his commandments (119:47-48, 127), of his testimonies (119:119, 167) of his precepts (119:159). One is able to love Yahweh when he knows Yahweh's primary love and responds with responsible devotion to both God and man.<sup>52</sup>

Before leaving this section, a word must be said concerning the relationship of man's love to God with the

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<sup>51</sup>Good, op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

Greek understanding of "eros." The Hebrews do not have the mystical quest of the religious eros, the uncontainable upward striving towards the divine, such as in prominent in Plato, Plotinus, etc. Rather, the initiative for love lies with God, and man's love for God is dependent upon God's prior love. This is not to say that man has no desire for communion with God, for he does. It is to say that God initiates the relationship.

Man's love to man. Earlier it was shown that the language of human love in friendship, marriage, and passion entered into the Hebrew's speech about God. But the relationship of God's love to man's love is not obvious, for God is God and not man.

There is much human love in the Old Testament that does not appear to be dependent upon the prior love of God for its existence. The Song of Songs celebrates love in an emotional and ecstatic way, but it is not a religious poem, and it never attempts to explain the relationship of man's love to the love of God. Any attempt to read such meaning into the poem by allegorizing theologians and mystics does not have a foundation in the book itself.

There is no asceticism in the Hebrew mind with respect to human natural love.<sup>53</sup>

There are several passages in the Old Testament where chesed is shown by one Hebrew to another where there is no understanding of covenant present. For instance, a friend may show chesed to a friend (II Samuel 16:17; Job 6:14), or a mistress to her household (Proverbs 31:26). In both cases, there is neither oath nor covenant. It is often argued that the covenant with God is always in the background of such chesed, even though it is not specifically mentioned. However, this argument loses strength in that the Gentiles who have no covenant also practice chesed (Esther 2:9; Daniel 1:9). It can thus be concluded that while covenant between men implies chesed, chesed, when shown by man to man, does not necessarily imply covenant. The concept of chesed is broader than that of covenant.<sup>54</sup>

In the Old Testament, most chesed between men does take place in covenant. A prime example of what such a covenantal relationship entails is seen in the covenant

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<sup>53</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>54</sup>Smith, op. cit., pp. 10-11.



between David and Jonathan. Jonathan loved David "as his own soul" (I Samuel 18:1, 3; 20:17), and their relationship was one of "sacred covenant" (I Samuel 10:8), the decisive quality of which is *chesed*, the loyalty of devoted love. David even goes so far as to say that the covenantal love was of more value and deeper meaning than love for a woman (II Samuel 1:26). Jonathan spontaneously helps David escape from his father, and David, following the death of Jonathan, gave continual kindness to Jonathan's family (II Samuel 9:1, 3, 7). Human covenants, as divine covenants, call for a response, and love is always the central characteristic of the relationship. Without genuine caring and communion, a covenant fails. In a covenantal relationship, love is a consistent loyalty which both parties can put full trust in (Genesis 21:23, II Samuel 10:2; I Kings 2:7; I Chronicles 19:2). When a covenant is broken by one of the parties, it is considered total irresponsibility (cf. II Samuel 3:8; 16:17; II Chronicles 24:22).<sup>55</sup>

Covenantal love between men is dependent on the prior love of God to men, it is part of man's response to

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<sup>55</sup>Good, op. cit., p. 166.

the love of God. Because of God's love, man is to love his "neighbor" (Leviticus 19:18). But who is the neighbor?

Generally, the neighbor (sometimes "brother") refers to fellow Israelites, in particular those who need help, the weak, poor, the orphan, the widow. The neighbor also referred to a resident alien, i.e., a foreigner living within Israel's territory who was without civic rights and therefore especially helpless (Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 19:34). Although it is not emphasized, there are instances where the enemy is considered a neighbor. This was true when the enemy was in need of help (Exodus 23:4f; cf. Deuteronomy 22:1-4; Proverbs 25:21). However, it never says that the enemy who needs help, must also be loved.<sup>56</sup>

The Old Testament commandment to love the neighbor is not a sentimental commandment but a practical one. It is a commandment that starts at home and works outward. Even though one expresses love through deeds, it is a matter of the heart (Leviticus 19:17 with 18). Even though Deuteronomy 23:6 does not allow the Israelite to initiate peace with an Ammonite or Moabite, it must be noted that the neighbor did come to have a universal definition for

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<sup>56</sup>Richardson, op. cit., p. 133.

men like the authors of Jonah and the Servant Songs (e.g., Isaiah 49:6). Such men believed that the Gentiles were neighbors to whom Israel had a God-appointed mission.<sup>57</sup>

## LOVE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### The Term "Agape"

The term "agape" (117-- Paul 75, John's Gospel 7, John's Epistles 21), was borrowed from the LXX, had its meaning transfigured, and became Christian once and for all. The transfiguration was slow and gradual and something of the process can be seen in the documents. In the Synoptic Gospels, where the noun agape appears only twice (Luke 11:42; Matthew 24:12), the main evidence is in the verb "agapan" and the adjective "agapetos." Where agapan (134--Synoptics 23, Paul 32, John's Gospel 34, John's Epistles 30) occurs in the Synoptics, the texts can be divided into three different groups. First, the word is used as a description of various kinds of love (Mark 10:21; Luke 7:5, 42, 47; 11:43; 16:13; cf. John 19:26, II Corinthians 9:7). Even though the word has a greater variety of

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

usage in the LXX, this does show that the word is now in common use. Second, it occurs in reference to the two great commandments (Mark 12:30-33; Luke 10:25ff; cf. Luke 11:42), i.e., it describes the love of man for God and for other men. Third, it refers to loving enemies (Luke 6:27-36; Matthew 5:44-46).<sup>58</sup>

The term "agapetos," "beloved" (61), is common in Paul (26) but rare in the Synoptics (9--e.g., Mark 12:6; Matthew 12:18; Luke 20:12). The Synoptics only use the phrase of Jesus, "The Beloved" of God. The Father calls Him, on two different occasions, "My beloved Son" -- once when Jesus undertakes His mission to sinners, and once when He is preparing Himself to die for men (Mark 1:11; 9:7).<sup>59</sup>

The New Testament retains the same structure as the Old Testament by revealing the love of God through election. However, the New Testament speaks of election in relationship to God's Son, Jesus the Elect Man, and man is saved by what God does through Him. This is the key to the New Testament doctrine of love. Barth has pointed out that it is no longer the election of Israel, but the election of

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<sup>58</sup>Smith, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

a person. The LXX uses the Greek word meaning "Son of his Love" for Israel; the New Testament gives this ascription to Christ.<sup>60</sup> Also, James Moffatt points out when the word "beloved" was used of Jesus it was interchangeable with "elected." This is shown in Matthew 12:18 and in Luke's account of the transfiguration, "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to Him."<sup>61</sup>

Because of the object of the election in the New Testament, the Old Covenant has been replaced, and in its place is the New Covenant sealed in the blood of Christ. Agape is no longer God's election-love for "Israel after the flesh." It now includes all men of every nation with no hesitation. It opens the new way for fellowship between God and man, the new way of righteousness, i.e., salvation.<sup>62</sup>

Further, agape is also used to describe the attitude of one man to another and to all men.<sup>63</sup> It is love by

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<sup>60</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 34-35.

<sup>61</sup>James Moffatt, Love in the New Testament (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929), p. 78.

<sup>62</sup>Snaith, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>63</sup>Moffatt, op. cit., p. 79.

one who is "in Christ" and, therefore, loves his fellow-man as he was first loved. It is not isolated self-love and desire (eros), neither is it general humanitarian love (philia). It is love that is equated with the love of God for man. It is not dependent upon the loved one, but only on the lover. It does not feel that justice comes first; justice does come before philia, but not before agape.<sup>64</sup>

It is often said that the New Testament writers had to invent a new word, agape, for a quality of love that came into the world with Christ. Although it is true that the noun is infrequent in pre-biblical Greek, this does not mean that the word is new. The important point, however, is that the LXX wisely used the colorless verb agapan to translate the Hebrew for Love (root '-h-b). The objections to the use of eros and philia were that they had been defined already by Greek mythology and pagan "erotic" religions. The verb agapan is used often in the Old Testament; God loves Israel (Deuteronomy 10:15; Hosea 11:1, etc.) and it is the Israelites duty to love God (Deuteronomy 6:4f) and his neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) including even

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<sup>64</sup>W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (London: Oliphants, 1940), p. 21.

the "stranger" (Deuteronomy 10:19). The noun agape occurs some thirty times in the LXX.<sup>65</sup>

The difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament teaching about agape is that the former develops agape in relationship to the codes of law, and so loses total spontaneity. The latter regards agape as an eschatological reality, a quality of life in the Age to Come, but one which is nevertheless even now "shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). Both the Old and New Testaments see agape as different from eros, in that eros is brought into action only by the attractiveness of the object loved, whereas agape loves even the unlovable and those who have nothing to offer in return. Agape can thus be seen as a word that describes God's attitude of free and utter grace in his dealings with Israel, old and new. The word eros does not occur in the New Testament.<sup>66</sup>

This new understanding of agape is not something that men discovered on their own, but there was a new scope present in the revealed love of God in Jesus Christ. As

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<sup>65</sup>Richardson, op. cit., p. 269n.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

indicated above, this new revelation was steeped in and directly related to the tradition of the Hebrew religion. The Old Testament conception of covenant as a bond between God and His people which involved His entrance into human life and history with a purpose of loving grace, made it possible to believe that time could embrace a divine act of eternal significance. Also, the Old Testament gives prophetic hope and indicates a redemptive value is attached to the sufferings of the good, and the atonement of sin being made through a Servant.<sup>67</sup> Thus it is necessary to understand the Old Testament if one is to comprehend the meaning of New Testament love.

The above has indicated that agape involves relationship and not just spontaneous giving. Williams states: "Agape is inadequately described as only the spontaneous, unmotivated uncalculated self-giving of the Holy God, regardless of the value of its object. Agape is first the spirit of communion willing the divine relationship between Father and Son and the ground and pattern of the fulfillment of all things." He goes on to say that such an agape is the "will to communion" between God and man and between

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<sup>67</sup>Moffatt, op. cit., pp. 6-7.



man and his neighbor.<sup>68</sup> I agree with Williams because I believe both the Old and New Testament state plainly that God has something at stake in His relationship with man. Both God and man will communion and both are hurt and suffer if it is not attained. In this way, both man and God "desire" in the positive sense of that term. Life is never full in isolation, but in communion with others and with God.

It has been shown that agape can refer to both the love of God and the love of man. It is now necessary to discuss in more detail how agape functions as God's love and in human love.

### Divine Love

The Synoptics. The Synoptics never say that God loves. However, all that Jesus teaches about God implies an infinite love. The two great commandments (Mark 12:30-31; Matthew 19:19) seem to depend upon the prior assumption that God is lovable and loving.

Although the Synoptics do not say God loves, they do make use of the human analogies of the love of God as

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<sup>68</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 37.

seen in the parables of Jesus. The prodigal son is a typical example of human love and human pride. The mercy of the love of God is compared with the love and compassion of a father. The story speaks of the relationship of God's love to the human spirit. However, one must be careful not to conclude that the agape of the New Testament is nothing but the grace of God poured out without motive upon the unworthy. It is that to be sure, but it is also the spirit of relatedness of those who rejoice because of their new life with God and their fellowman in the freedom of love.<sup>69</sup>

The Synoptics show the great pardoning love of God, but Jesus also sees the aspect of a separate and special calling through divine love. This is the love of God as it is directed towards Jesus. Jesus has this in mind when he gives the parable of the wicked husbandmen and speaks of the "beloved son" (Mark 12:5; cf. Matthew 12:18). The only Son is called to follow to the end the same path the prophets took and on which they met death. The "beloved Son" is the only martyr at the turning point in time. In His death, the entire world is judged and the foundation for a new order for all things is laid (Mark 12:8ff). Jesus is

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

the founder and initiator of the New Age, and by being related to Him one is related to the coming age. If one is not related to Jesus Christ, he is not related to the love of God according to the Synoptics. The Synoptics demand unconditional attachment to Jesus, even unto death (Matthew 10:37ff; cf. Luke 14:26).<sup>70</sup>

It is through the love of God that the Son brings forgiveness to men. "He creates a new people of God which renounces all hatred and force and with an unconquerable resolve to love treads the way of sacrifice in the face of all opposition. And He Himself dies, as the ancient tradition tells us, with a request for the hostile world" (Luke 23:34).<sup>71</sup>

In Mark 10:21, *agapan* is used to describe the feeling of Jesus. When Jesus saw the "rich young ruler," he was impressed by his enthusiasm and high moral character and he "loved him." It is sometimes argued that "loved" should be translated "caressed" or "embraced;" in fact, in one Latin MS it reads "osculatus est," which means Jesus

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<sup>70</sup>Ethelbert Stauffer, "*αγαπη* : B-F," in Kittel, *op. cit.*, I, 48.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

acted like a rabbi who would kiss a pupil for a good answer. However, in this case, the word probably refers to an inward impulse of admiring affection. And yet, Jesus makes a higher demand on him and gives the young man the opportunity to respond. As in the case of his own title of "beloved," so here divine love carries with it a moral discipline and service.<sup>72</sup> Never does either Testament speak of love unless it is in some way related to action.

The Synoptics use "beloved" only in referring to Jesus, and then only at the beginning of His ministry and at the end of His passion (Mark 1:11; 9:7). And Mark relates love, election and heightened personal demand in a short phrase introduced in 10:21: Jesus loved the rich young ruler with the love of God that summons men to the highest.<sup>73</sup>

Paul. Paul, as the Synoptics, does not distinguish the love of Jesus from the love of God. Paul's Christ is given the power to forgive sins which makes the love of God

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<sup>72</sup>Moffatt, op. cit., pp. 75-76.

<sup>73</sup>Stauffer, op. cit., p. 48.

basically one with the love of Christ (Romans 8:37; II Thessalonians 2:16). God's loving action is both revealed and acted out in Christ (Romans 5:8). This love of God in the love of Christ is a world-changing event that Paul normally expresses in the verbal form and then always in the aorist.<sup>74</sup> God's action in Christ allows for man to be saved and to live in communion ("in Christ") with God.

The love of God is, therefore, seen as "the orientation of the sovereign will of God to the world of men and the deliverance of this world" which allows man to live in communion with the Spirit of God. Paul believes that this was God's goal from the days of Abraham when He foresaw a people that were no longer under the bondage of the Law. This purpose is fulfilled by God in sending his Son and then the Spirit. However, Paul speaks escatologically of the Spirit for it is represented in Galatians 5:2-6:10 as the "Spirit of love" (Galatians 5:22). Thus Paul leaves the realm of wordly history in his thinking.<sup>75</sup> This Spirit of love becomes the foundation for man's ethical freedom and allows for communion with both man and God.

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-50.

Paul writes in Romans 5:5: "God's love for us has already been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." The words "poured out" are generally used to refer to the giving of the Spirit by God. Paul says that the Spirit has been poured out into the hearts of men, and that by this means, God's love has become fully operative, both in making us aware of its presence, and by the transforming power it has in us. Paul is clear in saying that those who receive the Spirit have God's love and will not be disappointed in their hope for meaningful life that they have set on Him.<sup>76</sup> It is the grace of God which brings us life and communion with Him. The Son and the Spirit which come to man through God's grace are an element in God's love in salvation which anticipates the salvation itself (Romans 13:11).

Paul speaks of agape as it reveals itself in works of action. Romans 5:8 reads: "God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." This involves the sentiment of love, but more importantly Paul uses agape only as God "shows" it in letting Christ

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<sup>76</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 291-292.

die for us. The action aspect is again emphasized in Romans 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?", in that "love" refers to the salvation-occurrence that is in the previous verse--the death and resurrection of Christ. God's love is thus seen as God's deed of love. A deed that allows man and God to remain in relationship rather than isolation.

That God revealed his love in the death of Christ is more than mere compassion. It means God's freedom in taking the initiative on behalf of undeserving man, and it is also his faithfulness to His declared word. There are many parallels in the New Testament to the statement that Christ died "on behalf" of the ungodly (Mark 14:24; John 10:11; 11:50ff; Romans 8:32; 14:15; I Corinthians 11:24; 15:3; II Corinthians 5:15,21; Galatians 1:4; 2:20; Ephesians 5:2,25; I Thessalonians 5:10; I Timothy 2:6; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 2:9; 10:12; I Peter 2:21; 3:18; I John 3:16). The conviction that Christ died for sinners (or for sin) was without question a central thought of the primitive church; however, it cannot be concluded that all Christians agreed upon why He died for sinners. Paul, in Romans 5:6, is not concerned with a rationale of the crucifixion; he

stresses only the love revealed in the fact that Christ went to such lengths on our behalf.<sup>77</sup> In Christ, God Himself has been willing to suffer for man.

Grace and love are very similar in Paul. Both appear in formula-like expressions, and love sometimes takes the place of grace (e.g., II Corinthians 13:11) and is sometimes combined with it (e.g., II Corinthians 13:14). When this is the case, agape like charis means all that God has given man and done for salvation. The activity of the Holy Spirit for salvation is also terms "love" when Paul makes an appeal (Romans 15:30) "by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit."<sup>78</sup>

Because of the similarities between grace and love in Paul, it is important to discuss Paul's understanding of grace. "Charis" (grace) and "eleos" (loving-kindness, mercy) are closely related to the Old Testament concept of chesed. The Old Testament speaks of God as gracious towards helpless men and often in the same breath declares that he is merciful (e.g., Exodus 33:19; II Chronicles 30:9;

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<sup>77</sup>C. K. Barrett, The Epistle to the Romans (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 106.

<sup>78</sup>Bultmann, op. cit., I, 292.



Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 77:9; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2: "God is a gracious God, full of compassion, slow to anger, plentiful in mercy, and he will abundantly pardon"). There is a verbal difference between the usage of the LXX and that of New Testament, because while the LXX generally uses *eleos* (mercy) as the translation of *chesed*, the New Testament uses *charis* much more frequently to express the same idea. Thus, one can conclude that *chesed* or *eleos* bear the meaning of "grace" or "unmerited favour;" it may also stand for the idea of God's loyalty to the covenant, and may be translated as "covenant-love." There is even a tendency in the later prophets to view *chesed* in terms of eschatological gifts which will be plentifully out-poured in the last days: cf. Zechariah 12:10, "I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and mercy." Note that the "Spirit" is what is being poured out by God.) In the New Testament, *eleos* is not frequent: of its twenty-seven appearances, nine are in relationship to the Old Testament and seven are in salutations. Its place is taken by *charis*. In the New Testament

charis means primarily God's forgiving love towards man as  
<sup>79</sup>  
 sinful.

Paul is responsible for the New Testament's most thorough development of grace. He sees grace as a "gift" that is free and unearned (Ephesians 2:8f). Any idea of salvation by works destroys God's gospel. There can be no righteousness by man on his own (Romans 10:3; Philemon 3:9), it must be a free gift from God (Romans 4:17ff, etc.). "Thus, for Paul, grace and faith may be said to represent complementary processes in the whole act of salvation: grace is the objective, saving activity of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, while faith is the subjective aspect of the process in us; it is, however, not something that we do."<sup>80</sup> It is likely that Pauline influence is behind John 1:14-17, where the incarnate Word is said to be "full of grace and truth" and it is contrasted with the way that truth was given by Moses.

It was indicated earlier that Paul's understanding of God's love is bound up in eschatology and the "new life"

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<sup>79</sup>Richardson, op. cit., pp. 281-282.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

which is the result of God's grace. Bultmann is helpful at this point:

As resurrection-life beyond bodily death, 'life,' then, is a future thing yet to come. In Romans 5:1-11, Paul has to defend his thesis that eschatological righteousness is already present, against the objection that the other signs of eschatological salvation are not yet to be seen. Hence, he also has to point out that 'life' is already bestowed upon the right wised. When he does this, he first does it by speaking of 'life' as a thing of the future which determines the present as only a 'hope of the glory of God'--but such a hope, be it noted, 'does not disappoint,' for its foundation is the Spirit-given knowledge of God's 'love.'<sup>81</sup>

Because of eschatological existence, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is central in the writings of Paul. It is within the effective working of the Holy Spirit that the entire work of agape takes place. The Spirit convicts men of sin; He sows in the hearts of men the seed of true repentance; He even turns men to God. Paul uses the Old Testament understanding of "ruach-adonai" (the Spirit of the Lord) in its most complete sense. The Spirit is not seen as an activity of God, but rather, He is God Himself. The Spirit is manifested completely in Jesus Christ, and is now manifest in human lives bring eschatological

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<sup>81</sup>Bultmann, op. cit., I, 347.

existence. "The identification both with the realization of the ancient ruach-adonai as a 'mystery' now revealed to the initiated, and with the Lord Jesus (II Corinthians 3:17), is now complete and clear."<sup>82</sup>

John and the Epistles. For Paul and the Synoptics, divine love places emphasis on love for the helpless, the ungodly, and thus it is unmotivated. John, on the other hand, sees agape as essentially "love for the brethren." For John, the Father loves those whom he has taken out of the world and given to the Son, and who have kept His word (John 17:60); it is not an unmotivated or irrational love, but it is what would naturally be expected. In Paul, we have a man who is totally what he is because of the grace and love of God which he did not deserve; while in John, it is self-evident that Christ's love is bound up with membership in the circle of his disciples.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, in John, love to God or Christ takes second place behind love to the brethren which has its source in God and its

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<sup>82</sup>Snaith, op. cit., pp. 182-183.

<sup>83</sup>Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 155.

prototype in Christ. Thus, love between the brethren is a love that is not of this world. This leads John to the position that love to God or Christ is secondarily to love of the brethren which has its foundation in God.<sup>84</sup>

In John, the fundamental concept is "God is Love" (I John 4:8, 16). This statement is only made here, although Paul comes very close to it (II Corinthians 13:11). John believes that a key to Christianity from the Incarnation on is "God is love." There also must be a second key added--"God is light" (I John 1:5, i.e., "holiness"). It is not coincidence that John finds the ground for both texts in the Atonement (I John 1:7; 4:10). The Christian doctrine of God, John explains as having two foci, Holiness and Love. In the Cross, God says two things to men: here is your sins final affront to My Holiness; here is My love's way of meeting the affront. In I John 4:8, the author goes on to speak of the Incarnation; in I John 4:17 he speaks of the day of judgment and the confidence we can have because God "is love perfected within us."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Gottfried Quell and Ethelbert Stauffer, "Love," in Gerhard Kittel, Key Bible Words (New York: Harper & Bros., 1951), p. 62.

<sup>85</sup>Smith, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

In John, it is Christ who reveals the nature of God, which is love, although this is directly stated only in the First Epistle. However, in John 17:24-26 and John 3:16, the noun *agape* is used of something given by God to men through Christ and associated with His glory. In John 17:11, the name God stands for a unifying or integrating power -- "that they may be one." In I John 3:16, love is related to sacrifice; a similar relationship is made in John 15:13, which follows the new commandment in 15:12. In John 15:9, 10, the love of the Father for Christ and Christ's love for men both have ethical conditions--if you keep My commandments as I keep My Father's--so Christ is the great example and mediator of love (cf. I John 3:1; 4:7; 4:12-14). Christ is presented as One identified with love before the world was created (John 17:22-26).<sup>86</sup>

It is the love of God for Christ that leads Christ to reveal the Father (John 5:19, 20; 17:24). Once again, the love of God is seen as a reward for obedience in that Christ says, "therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life" (cf. John 14:21, 23). It is possible for

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<sup>86</sup>J. Ernest Davey, The Jesus of St. John (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958), pp. 107-108.

the love of God to be perfected in men, but it is only in Christ that this has been the case (John 15:10). Christ responds to the Father's love with obedience (John 14:31) in a relationship in which love is both the motive (John 14:31) and the result (John 10:17) of Christ's obedience. It is interesting that this does not fit a cosmological Logos, even though its form is not always historical, but it is a result of the historical tradition of Jesus and His first followers.<sup>87</sup>

One of the apparent paradoxes of the Fourth Gospel is found in its understanding of the word "world." It is used of the totality of creation and in particular of humanity which is the object of God's love; however, it is also used to designate mankind in so far as it rejects Christ, lives in darkness, performs evil works, remains ignorant of God, and rejoices over the death of God's Son (cf. John 7:7; 8:23; 14:17; 15:18ff; 17:25). Even though the Logos is responsible for the creation of the world, it is not the ruler of the world--the devil is (John 8:44; 12:3; 14:30; 16:11). It is unfair to conclude from this point that John is speaking of a duality in which God loves

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

and rules the spiritual world while the devil controls the material world. But creation which is good has become self and God-contradictory in its response to God because of the fall.<sup>88</sup> But God is unwilling to give up the world and, thus, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" so that the love of God could be realized and experienced by man. As we experience the love of God in communion with the brethren and the Christ we experience the fullness of life.

Paul views agape as the principle of the future as we discussed earlier; John sees agape as the principle of the world of Christ which is being built in the midst of the present cosmic crisis (John 3:16; I John 4:9f). Although the wording is different, in basic thought John and Paul (Romans 8:32) are one at this point.

John's cosmology understands agape as a condescending love. It is a heavenly reality which in some sense descends from stage to stage into this world. This agape only achieves revelation and victory in moral action. It is for this reason that John sees that which is clarified in Paul in terms of the interrelation of divine work and

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<sup>88</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Bros., 1951), p. 198.



human action. The "light" of the world is expressed in the form of love. Thus, John must emphasize the active character of agape in the life of Christ and in the lives of Christians.<sup>89</sup>

### Human Love

The Synoptics. In the Synoptic Gospels, man's love towards God is maintained as the first and greatest commandment. Christian love towards God does not seek to gain anything except communion with the divine. It is spontaneous, in the sense that it is the free surrender of the heart to God. One will not be attempting to gain God's favour by loving for man has already received God's love and grace. However, unlike Nygren,<sup>90</sup> I do believe that the Synoptics say that man can grow and mature by living in the grace and love of God. However, Nygren is correct in saying that one does respond to God's love without pre-occupation with reward: "When Ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable

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<sup>89</sup>Stauffer, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>90</sup>Nygren, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do'" (Luke 17:10).

Although the importance of love to God is obvious in the Synoptics in the central place it is given, it is only referred to twice by Jesus. Once it is used as a denunciation of the Pharisees (Luke 11:42) and this is the only passage where agape occurs in Luke's gospel. In Matthew 23:23, the Pharisees are accused of omitting the heavier matters of the Torah, justice and mercy and faithfulness. Luke defines mercy ("eleos") as "Love for God" and eliminates faithfulness. Thus, he is probably closer to Jesus' original stress on the love of God and neighbor (Luke 10:27), since justice is an equivalent for the latter (cf. Isaiah 1:16-18; Psalms 33:5). Luke takes a legitimate stand in substituting "love to God" for "mercy."<sup>91</sup>

The second allusion in the Synoptics of man's love to God shows that love to God means serving Him (Matthew 6:24). This is the only passage in the Synoptics where "serve" is applied to the relationship between man and God. However, Luke 16:13, is in harmony with the thought

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<sup>91</sup>Moffatt, op. cit., pp. 85-86.

in Matthew. But Luke introduced the thought by speaking of the relationship of a human servant to a human master. The meaning is the same in both Luke and Matthew, however. This idea of serving only one master is not new (cf. Malachi 1:6; 3:17).<sup>92</sup>

In the Synoptics, the possibility of love to God is placed into a radical either/or category: "No one can serve two masters. . . You cannot serve God and mammon" Matthew 6:24. To love God is to live for Him completely as a servant (Luke 17:7ff), i.e., in communion with Him. It means that one freely places himself under His lordship, and values this realization of His lordship above all else (Matthew 6:33). It means to base one's entire being in God, to trust all in His hands. It is to despise all that does not serve God, and to break ties with all such things (Matthew 5:29f). One is bound to God.<sup>93</sup>

The Synoptic Jesus tells us that we are to renounce the worship of mammon and vainglory if we are to love God. To love and desire money or prestige for itself is incompatible with loving God. There is also another danger

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>93</sup>Stauffer, op. cit., p. 45.

which threatens love to God, the threat of persecution. Jesus, as well as some great Jewish theologians (e.g., Akiba), realized that assaults, sufferings, afflictions, etc., which the disciples face, will be a test of their loyalty to God (cf. Matthew 10:17ff; 5:10ff). Those, however, who continue to live with God in loving communion will experience salvation (Matthew 24:12f).<sup>94</sup>

Thus the underlying argument of Matthew 6:19-24 is that the religious life must be inward in principle and also a unity; there is no room for a weak compromise. The object of our faith and confidence is determinative of our character. Jesus is pressing for confidence in and loyalty to God the Father as the regulative power in our lives.<sup>95</sup>

Before concluding the discussion on man's love to God in the Synoptics, it is important to show the relationship between man's love to God and man's faith in God. The Synoptic understanding of faith is generally summed up in Jesus' last words to the penitent woman: "Your faith

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>95</sup>Moffatt, op. cit., p. 89.

has saved you, go in peace." Your faith, not your love. The normal attitude of man to God is one of faith rather than love in the Synoptics. In the Synoptics, the allusions to man's love for God are almost as scarce as those of God's love for man. The reason for this seems to be that the Synoptics assume love to God as an inherited religious principle in the experience of his disciples, and that faith gives a deeper expression of man's relationship to God. Trust in the divine love and power was evidently a more adequate term than love. Love does not necessarily emphasize the humble trust which, for Jesus, was so vital in man's relationship to God.<sup>96</sup>

There is much material concerning the love of the neighbor in the Synoptic Gospels. The command to love the neighbor "as one's self," implies love for self, and opens up into the Golden Rule, although the rule is not given in love-language. There is a new interpretation of the neighbor and an extension of the Old Testament concept of love to one's enemies. Also, there is an organic connection between brotherly love and love to God and God's love, which is the religious basis of ethical teaching. Chris-

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 93-94.

tians love each man in God and God in every man.<sup>97</sup> The love of the brother is wholly dependent on and conditioned by God's prior love for man. The Synoptics as Paul and John see Christian love as an imitation of divine love (Matthew 5:43ff; Luke 6:35f; John 13:34; 15:12; Romans 15:7; Ephesians 4:32-5:2).

Thus, we can make an extremely important point: self-love never becomes a yardstick by which one judges love to the neighbor. The Synoptic Gospels never advocate love which has the self as the ultimate beneficiary (e.g., be humble so may be exalted, serve to attain greatness-- Mark 10:43; Luke 14:7ff). Rather a man's heart must be made clean (Mark 7:21) so that he is sincere in what he does (Matthew 6:1; 7:3-5; cf. Mark 12:38-40). He treats others as he would like to be treated (Luke 6:31), but not with the end in mind that he will be treated as such. The Christian is merciful (Matthew 5:7), forgiving seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-22). He is tolerant of non-conformists (Mark 9:40) and generous (Luke 14:13). The will to love in such a way is a spontaneous response to

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

God's love, although the way to correct action is often deliberate and the action a conscious effort.

That agape must be seen as an act of the will and the mind and not of emotion is shown beautifully in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The "outsider" in trouble is not to be passed by, for any "outsider" is the neighbor to be loved (Luke 10:30-37). Jesus' choice of the Samaritan was deliberate for the Jews despised Samaritans (John 4:9). Therefore, any love in this situation would not be a matter of emotion but of the mind and the will.<sup>98</sup> The scriptures also witness to the fact that this is the way in which God loves man. Loving grace is offered when man deserves nothing but judgment.

In Matthew 25:31ff, the neighbor is understood "christologically." The neighbor is a representative of Christ who is to receive the love and service we would give to Christ. In our neighbor, we meet Christ. This makes it clear that such an agape is not a diluted form of liking someone or passionate love as is sometimes sentimentally

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<sup>98</sup> G. Johnston, "Love in the New Testament," The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), III, 170.

imagined.<sup>99</sup> Such a love is not an emotional feeling, but is an attitude toward mankind based upon the experience of God in life. One responds to God by giving spontaneously and desiring communion and fellowship with men as well as with God.

It is now a logical step for Jesus to demand love of enemies, a position consciously opposed by Jewish tradition and de-emphasized in the Old Testament. Love of the enemy is now in the forefront. This is a demand of a new age ("it was said by them of old time . . . But I say unto you," Matthew 5:43). It also points to the Christian showing grace in that it takes him beyond loving only those who also love him (Matthew 5:46f). And it places enemies in the plural (Luke 6:27) as opposed to hating one enemy (Matthew 6:43).

This new understanding of love to enemies is agape in the attitude of the new people of God. They should show love without expecting any reward in return and give when there is need even though their gift will not be returned. It means doing good to those who hate them, blessing those who curse them and praying for their persecutors (Luke

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<sup>99</sup>Richardson, op. cit., p. 136.



6:27; Matthew 5:44). It needs to be mentioned, that when these demands are viewed individually, it is sometimes possible to find isolated parallels in the Rabbinic writings. However, they do not have the significance or the power of the Synoptic statements. Even the martyr spirit of the Jewish community does not have the will for martyrdom that is present in the Synoptics (Luke 6:28ff). "A new intercession is here made the task of the martyr, namely, intercession for the hostile world, which hates God and destroys his faithful people."<sup>100</sup> It can thus be said that to a real degree God's love becomes the Christian's love.

Love is rewarded by God; however, it is incorrect to say that love is stimulated by the reward. God's love is the stimulus of love, not that we are rewarded because we love. If the reward were the stimulus to love, agape would lose the essential quality of spontaneity ("I can do no other") and cease to be agape. This is not to say that the desire for communion is no longer present in both God and man. However, the desire for communion does not negate the spontaneous quality of agape.

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<sup>100</sup>Stauffer, op. cit., p. 46.

Paul. In the Synoptics, the commandment of love is a double commandment of love toward God and neighbor with an emphasis upon the love of God who has offered us forgiveness and relationship with Him. Paul's position is the opposite. For Paul, the commandment to love the neighbor takes the forefront (Romans 13:9). In fact, Paul rarely speaks of agape in the sense of man's love to God or Christ. He rather refers to man giving "glory" to God.

For Paul, God is always the agent, man the recipient of divine love which came through Christ. There are only three times<sup>101</sup> in all of Paul's writings that he refers directly to man loving God. In two of these incidents Paul is very careful to return man to the position of recipient of love before he ends the sentence. "If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, one is known by him" (I Corinthians 8:3; cf. Hosea). Such a definite and obvious shift from the active to the passive

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<sup>101</sup>Paul speaks only rarely of love for God apart from Romans 8:28 and I Corinthians 8:3; cf. II Thessalonians 3:5. In the verse, II Thessalonians 2:10, there is a strong influence of Tradition. In Philemon 5 the agape is to be chastically related to the "pure." Finally cf. Ephesians 6:24; 4:15.

voice of the verb makes it clear that Paul never intended that man should become the initiator in "the love of God." Man is first known and loved by God. "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Once again the initiator of love is God who calls men.<sup>102</sup> It is God who has elected man, and from this proceeds all that may be called agape. The love of men to God is the direct flowing back of the heavenly love which has been poured out upon the "called." However, this is an act of decision on man's part just as God's love required an act of decision on His part. "In it there is fulfilled the covenant which God has concluded with His elect and which defies all the powers of heaven and earth" (Romans 8:28).<sup>103</sup>

In both of the passages dealt with above, there is a reference to man's "gnosis" (i.e., knowledge). The test for Paul which determines if knowledge and wisdom are true or false is the test of agape--a test that is similar to the one proposed in I John (e.g., esp. 4:8). A false knowledge will puff up an individual with pride rather than

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<sup>102</sup>Ramsey, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>103</sup>Stauffer, op. cit., p. 50.

promote agape. Thus, Paul argues that if one has intimate knowledge of all the Mystery religions and their vaunted knowledge, he is still nothing if he does not have agape (I Corinthians 13:2). The Greek intellect or Hellenistic revelation is of no value if one does not possess love. "Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that all of us possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, the same is known by him" (I Corinthians 8:1-3). This passage is emphasizing that knowledge is not the saving power, but love. Love reveals the true meaning of knowledge; knowledge is not something we should become conceited about because true knowledge is not our knowledge of God, but God's knowledge of us. In the matter of true knowledge (i.e., saving knowledge) all is of God. In comparison with such knowledge, which Paul calls agape because it is a love relationship, knowledge of the academies and the sects amounts to nothing. Even the Jew cannot boast of his possession of "the form of gnosis and truth in the Law"

(Romans 2:20), because such knowledge does not save him but is in actuality his condemnation (Romans 2:17-29).<sup>104</sup>

Hence, we love God only because God "knows" us (I Corinthians 8:3). Such a knowledge means God has called us, entered into personal relationship with us, commissioned us to His service, and so on. It is not our cleverness or merit which has led us to the knowledge of God (i.e., the love of God) for as Paul writes to the Galatians: "At that time not knowing God, you were slaves to those which by nature are not gods (i.e., the demons or pagan dieties); but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how turn ye back again . . . ?" (Galatians 4:8f). In conclusion, let me mention that this knowledge is not complete (I Corinthians 13:9), but that it is sufficient for our daily guidance (I Corinthians 2:16), and that in the final day of revelation, we will know as we have been known (I Corinthians 13:12).<sup>105</sup>

It seems to me that it is impossible to talk of man's love to God in Paul without also referring to his

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<sup>104</sup>Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper & Bros., 1958), pp. 47-48.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., pp. 48-49.

understanding of "pistis-pisteuo" (faith, confidence, complete reliance) by which Paul describes man's relation to God, i.e., Faith, to have faith in (believe). Paul has followed the Hebrew usage through the LXX use of pistis-pisteuo as equivalents to the Hebrew root '-m-n. This he developed into loving trust and active confidence in a specifically Christian sense. Pistis comes to be used as the outstanding term for the Christian's attitude to God, just as agape is the outstanding term for God's attitude to the Christian.<sup>106</sup>

Paul has a great deal to say concerning the Christians love for his brothers. For Paul (the Synoptics and John also say it but not as emphatically) the spirit of love is the fulfillment of all righteousness from the perspective of one who has new life in Christ. Such a love is the ground of ethical freedom for Paul.<sup>107</sup>

Perhaps the most beautiful and descriptive statement on love for other men is to be found in Paul's thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians. The understanding of love presented here has a dynamic that is greater than the love

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<sup>106</sup>Snaith, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>107</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 41.

of a man for a man in the normal humanistic understanding of such love. If it were a typical human love, the word *philia* would have been used. Paul rather describes the love of a man who is "in Christ," and, therefore, of one who loves his fellowman with the sort of love wherewith Christ first loved him. Thus, it can be said in the literal sense of the word that man's love is God's love for man in that man loves from the position of being "in Christ." It is not self-love (*eros*), neither is it general humanitarian love (*philia*). It is love founded in the love of God for man. That is why it "seeketh not its own, . . . taketh no account of evil, . . . beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." This is why "agape never faileth." It is not dependent in any sense upon the worth of the one being loved, but only on the lover. Such an understanding of love is a parallel to what we have seen to be the case in God's love for man in both the Old and New Testaments.<sup>108</sup>

On the basis of the above, one can see that such a love must have the aspect of freedom. It is impossible to force a man to love in such a way. It must be spontaneous

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<sup>108</sup>Snaith, op. cit., p. 175.

and genuine care for the other. Paul tells us to "be servants of one another;" however, this does not stand alone but has the modifier "through love," which gives it its character. Because it is through love the lover has the freedom that is his as a "slave" of the "lord." He is "not under the law himself" but he has become a slave "to those under the law" and "to those outside the law" as "one outside the law" because he is within "the law of Christ" (I Corinthians 9:20f). In the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2) is the paradoxical demand that one love in his freedom. The "bearing" of "one another's burdens" which Paul considers fulfilling this "law," is a manifestation of being "servants of one another through love." It is agape working in this way that builds up the congregation and requires that one wave his "right" (I Corinthians 8:1; Romans 14:15). It is love that demands as well as allowing one to "seek the good of the neighbor" and not his own good (I Corinthians 10:24; 13:5). However, in loving, the lover finds the fullness of life even though his specific goal was to love the other. The one who loves with agape can do nothing else, and yet, he does love joyously and in freedom. As in the Synoptics, love is the fulfillment of



the Law, whose demands are summed up in "You shall love your neighbor as yourself " (Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14.)<sup>109</sup> Such human love is the outcome of Christ-redeeming love.

When Paul refers to the character of Jesus Christ (e.g., Romans 15:3f; I Corinthians 10:24; 11:1; Philemon 2:5ff) he speaks of self-sacrifice and unselfishness. Paul sees these as the outstanding features of Jesus Christ's character, and insist that this same spirit must be in Christians, as the fruit and effect of His Spirit. Whenever Paul calls on the churches to imitate the Spirit of the Lord, he invariably speaks of humble unselfishness. Yet the ethical demand upon men is normally not phrased so that man is to be an imitator of Christ. "For while the apostle has his own version of the Golden Rule (Galatians 5:14; Romans 13:8-10), he usually regards the obligation of brotherly love as a response to the Spirit rather than an imitation of Jesus or as obedience to a command of Jesus."<sup>110</sup> It is man's communion with the Spirit that

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<sup>109</sup>Bultmann, op. cit., I, 343-344.

<sup>110</sup>Moffatt, op. cit., p. 167.

moves him to give an ethical response to his brothers' needs.

Therefore, generally speaking, Paul connects the Spirit with most Christian love for others. The fruit or harvest "of the Spirit" in the community "is love" (Galatians 5:22). In Romans 15:30 ("Brothers, I beg of you, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love that the Spirit inspires, rally round me by praying to God for me.") Paul implies a mutual love inspired by the Spirit which leads them to prayer. Once again the idea of communion must be related to the spontaneous giving of agape. Paul's personal desire for prayer does not deny agape the power to be expressed spontaneously.

Paul does not view the Spirit as a sudden force or impulse that comes and goes nor is it merely endowed for special service, but it is the power of the indwelling Lord in the community of believers. It is what binds men to each other and to God in loving communion. Hence, love is not obedience to an external code, but it is the vital response to the Spirit as an inward power acting through the whole moral life of the society.<sup>111</sup> Thus, once again,

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

man's love is transformed to become an expression of God's love for it has a quality that is greater than humanistic caring.

Paul connects the moral endeavours of the Church with the indwelling Spirit of the Lord, a position not inconsistent with the Synoptics. The Spirit renews human nature and brings about such a change that from one point of view Paul sees the moral demands of the Christian life as the result of this power being manifest in believers. He even speaks in the paradox of "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," and of Christian graces or habits that are fruits of the Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, good temper, kindness, generosity, fidelity, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Agape which is the primary manifestation of the divine Spirit is placed first on the list.<sup>112</sup>

It is clear that Paul makes a strong contrast between the things of God and the things of man. The "fruits of the Spirit" are not the fruits of man. By making such a distinction, he is true to the Old Testament tradition of the "ruach-adonai" as that Power of God which

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., pp. 169-170.

descends upon a man, changes his heart and spirit, gives him new life and, in the New Testament phrase, makes him a child of God.<sup>113</sup>

With an understanding of the role of the Spirit in Christian love clearly in mind, it is possible to see the eschatological aspect of agape in Paul. To fulfill the law is not "work" in the sense of a meritorious accomplishment, but it is action with freedom. The deed of love is natural and free because it is "God-taught" (I Thessalonians 4:9). Love is an eschatological phenomenon. The faith which allows men eschatological existence is at work in such love (Galatians 5:6). Such an existence ("New Creation") is to be found only "in Christ" (II Corinthians 5:17). And that agape is an eschatological phenomenon is shown by the fact that it is the primary fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).<sup>114</sup>

The relationship of love and humility is very important in understanding the way in which the Christian man expresses love to his neighbor. Bultmann has made a profound statement concerning this:

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<sup>113</sup>Snaith, op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>114</sup>Bultmann, op. cit., I, 344.

A special phase of agape is 'humility.' Philemon 2:3, representing Christ as the example of it, is an exhortation to it. It is described as 'each counting the other better than himself,' a parallel formulation to Romans 12:10; 'in honor preferring one another' (KJ). This 'humility' does not mean a 'disposition' of soul nor man's relation to God, as II Corinthians 7:6, for instance, does, but means man's relation to men. Humility pays heed to their claim and does not insist upon pushing through one's own claims: 'looking not to one's own interests, but each one looking to the interest of others' (Philemon 2:4; cf. I Corinthians 10:24; 13:4). Humility, therefore, is a form of love. Its special character is indicated by the fact that it is placed in contrast with . . . self-seeking, egoism and . . . conceit. Its opposite is 'haughtiness,' which looks down upon others and 'boast'--the attitude against which Galatians 6:3 warns: 'For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor.' All such comparing of one's self with others and all judging of one's neighbor (II Corinthians 10:12-18; Romans 14:4,10,12f,22) has ceased in 'love.'<sup>115</sup>

Finally, Paul views Christian brotherly love as the only relevant and forward-looking (in the eschatological sense) attitude in this time of decision between the cross and "the end" ("telos"). Human agape stands directly under the significance of the cross. "It is a readiness for service and sacrifice, for forgiveness and consideration, for help and sympathy, for lifting up the fallen and

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., I, 345.

restoring the broken (Galatians 5:25ff; Romans 12:9f; I Corinthians 14:4ff.), in a fellowship which owes its very existence to the mercy of God and the sacrificial death of Christ" (Philemon 2:1ff; I Corinthians 8:11; Colossians 3:14ff).<sup>116</sup> Because love entails all this, it can be concluded that the work of God and the work of man unite. Love builds up (I Corinthians 8:1) in that it builds the work of the future. Agape stands under the sign of "the end." This is the great truth of I Corinthians 13. Love stands at the heart of faith, hope, and love, and is also greater than the other two. Faith and hope cannot be separated from this aeon. With love, however, the power of the future age is already breaking into the present form of the world. Therefore, Paul, as the Synoptics, sees agape as the only vital force which has a future in this aeon of death.<sup>117</sup>

John and the Epistles. This section will include a discussion of both the Gospel of John and John's Epistles. Love to God or the Father is the theme of the First Epistle

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<sup>116</sup>Stauffer, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

rather than of the Gospel. In the Gospel, love to God is mentioned as incompatible with a rejection of the Son by the unbelieving Jews (John 5:42), but it is in the First Epistle of John that love to God is treated fully.

By love's very nature, it is incomplete unless it is mutual; even in the Old Testament, love implies a relationship, it is never one-sided. God's love for man is not complete or satisfied until man loves Him. John agrees with Paul in speaking of the Son as 'beloved' because the Son loves the Father as the Father loves the Son (Ephesians 1:6; John 17:24, 26, etc.). There is also a sense in which the Father's love is not consummated until "the love wherewith thou lovest men" is "in (men) and I in them" (John 17:26). Or as I John says: "God is love" and, therefore, He craves that men should "abide in love" and so "in God" (I John 4:16, 12-15, 19).<sup>118</sup>

I John speaks of man's love in the following manner: "we love God," "we love, because he first loved us," "he that abideth in love abideth in God and God abideth in him," "let us love one another" (I John 5:1-3; 4:19, 16, 7). When these are viewed together they state or imply that the

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<sup>118</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 86.

love of God in Christ is the source of the Christians' love for God (cf. I John 2:5f; 3:23; 4:10). Such is the source of a distinctively Christian love--agape is the ground and sphere of a Christian's fellowship with God (cf. I John 2:15), and this inevitably leads to spontaneous love of other Christians for John (cf. I John 2:10f; 3:16ff; John 13:34; 15:12). Although I John does not directly mention the Christians' love for Christ, the Gospel supplies this link (John 14:15, 21-24).<sup>119</sup>

With Paul, I John emphasizes that belief and love go together (I John 3:23; 5:1). The truth is expressed in God's Son; hence, to believe the truth is to love the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Christ is the norm for believers, and as he defines the godhead, so he defines the true life: the faithful are thus the "children of God," and at the end they will be like Christ, for they shall see him as He is (I John 3:1-2). Love must issue in vision. Simultaneously, it provides assurance and hope. Those who know that the "Day of Judgment" is still to come can await it without fear, if they love God and are in communion with the Father

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid., pp. 96-97.



and the Son through the Spirit (I John 1:3-4; 4:17-18).

I John does not understand the Spirit as definitely linked to the moral life as Paul does, but rather it stands for the theological confession of the Incarnation, and for the witness to Jesus Christ as the Son in certain events of his life and in the sacraments (I John 4:2; 5:6-8).<sup>120</sup>

In the Gospel of John, to "know God" is a more characteristic phrase than to "believe in God." The Fourth Gospel shows that to know God is to love Him or to be "in Him" (i.e., dependent on Him). It is in this way that the relationship of believers to God is generally expressed (John 2:4-6). Where the Epistle emphasized being "in God," the Gospel sees no real difference between being "in God" and "in Christ" (John 5:20). (The Epistle does not see a difference either, it just uses being "in God.") The Gospel's point is that there is no "knowledge" of God apart from obedience to Him, as expressed in Christ. Love alone knows the God who is love, and such "knowledge" stimulates obedience and brings union with Him and love to him.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Johnston, op. cit., p. 176.

<sup>121</sup>Moffatt, op. cit., pp. 275-276.

"Know" and "knowledge" are used by John in the same way that they are used by Paul. They denote a personal relationship with God. There is anticipation of this understanding in the Old Testament prophets where knowledge of God implied such a relationship. In Hosea to "know God" was to "love Him," which means when one apprehends God's moral nature the result is a life of obedience, acting along the lines of His will.<sup>122</sup>

The Johannine writings all view love for God or Christ as initiated by divine sacrifice. In fact, Johannine theology of love is in agreement with Paul and others in seeing the covenant as a bond involving a relation to God which is created by His actions (often sacrificial) or grace in history. The actions of God reach a high point in the revelation of Jesus as the Christ, who awakens the full meaning and value of life for men. Such divine love stimulates reciprocal love and "its manifestations of the sphere in which that love finds an adequate expression."<sup>123</sup>

Moffat does a creditable job of summing up the Johannine understanding of man's love to God or Christ:

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 278.

The Johannine teaching on love to God or Christ indicates: (a) that such response is the natural outcome of love divine. Love seeks love. If love is the deepest thing in God, it must respond to the deepest thing in man, and the Johannine interpretation speaks simply of this as 'love.' . . . (b) But such love, so far from being an occupation of dreamy recluses, must enlist the mind and the will: 'love to be worthy of the name must be love at work, love governed by duty.'<sup>124</sup>

The Johannine writings convey the same meaning as Paul's "faith and love" in passages such as the following: "This is what he commands, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as He has commanded us to do" (I John 3:23). Thus the divine command entails the right "belief" about the Incarnation, and brotherly love as a response to the command of the incarnate Son. These two thoughts are inseparable.

John's understanding of human love will be discussed from the perspective that we are commanded to keep the commandment to love. When John speaks of "keeping His commandments" he is referring to whether or not we "know" Jesus Christ (I John 2:3-6). The imperative "keep my commandments," thus, reminds the believer of what he is

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

because of the love of God which man encounters most completely in the Son (John 15:9; I John 4:10).<sup>125</sup>

Keeping His commandments has the initial negative meaning of not loving the world (I John 2:15). Even though the believer is in the world (John 17:11) which is full of temptation, he is to keep himself free from "worldly desire" (I John 2:16).<sup>126</sup> However, it is important that even though John says he that "loves God" cannot "love the world," that this world is kept separate from the men who are in the world (I John 3:19). Similarly, while the passage does not directly teach love for the unbelievers (John's immediate purpose is to urge us to love the brethren), it is implied in that Jesus Christ is "the Saviour of the world." This implication is also evident in the unlimited text, "We love, because He first loved us."<sup>127</sup>

Positively, the commandment to love is seen as doing "what pleases Him" (I John 3:22) or as "walking in the light" (I John 1:6f). "Walking in the light" is more

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<sup>125</sup>Bultmann, op. cit., II, 80.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 81.      <sup>127</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 97.

specifically defined as love of one's brother (I John 2:9-11). Such love is the content of the commandments of Jesus, which can be called collectively His "commandment" (John 15:12; I John 3:23; 4:21).

The command makes clear the inner unity of indicative and imperative. It is out of the love that we have received that the "obligation to love" arises: "A new commandment I give you: to love each other as I loved you, in order that you, too, should love each other" (John 13:34). This close relationship between the believer receiving the love of Jesus Christ and responding in mutual love of God and man is seen in the two interpretations John gives of foot-washing. John first gives account of the service that Jesus performed (John 13:4-11). Secondly, the service is explained as an example for the disciples (John 13:12-20).<sup>128</sup>

That faith and love are a unity as they are in Paul is shown in John's description of the tree of life (the true vine, John 15:1-17). In it, the imperative "abide in my love" (verse 9) which, according to verses 1-9 is an

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<sup>128</sup>Bultmann, op. cit., II, 81.

exhortation to be loyal in faith, is followed by the indicative formulation: "If you keep My commandments, you will be abiding in My love" (John 15:10). Also, in I John the unity of faith and love is a major theme, along with the polemic against false teachings.<sup>129</sup>

Faith is the foundation for all future conduct of the believer, and hence all conduct is in love. It can, therefore, be said that it is in love that faith makes good its freedom from the world, and because it is such a triumph God's "commandments" are not "burdensome" (I John 5:3). One has freedom from the world and is not bound to it. John speaks of the love commandment as a "new commandment," but he does not mean this in the sense of historical novelty. This commandment is not seen as being new from the world's perspective (I John 2:7), but it is new through faith in that the believer now realizes eschatological existence: "Yet I am writing you a new commandment, which is true in him and in you, for the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (I John 2:8). In fulfilling the love commandment, believers realize eschatological existence: "We know that we have passed over

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

from death into life by the fact that we love our brothers"  
(I John 3:14).<sup>130</sup>

The brotherly love being discussed is actually the same agape with which the Father loves the Son and the Son the Father (John 17:26; I John 4:16). The unity that the commandment of love initiates is the result of God's love which man expresses. Disunity, on the other hand, is disobedience to the commandment of love, and is the same thing as unbelief (I John 5:1-3). Unity in love is the condition of the Church's existence, the test of whether the church is the Church. A divided fellowship is a contradiction of its own nature. Jesus prayed "that they all may be one, even as thou, Father, are in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me" (John 17:21; cf. 17:23).<sup>131</sup>

It needs to be mentioned once again that such love, although it is the rule within the believer's circle, it is not limited to just that group. On the contrary, it is the eschatological congregations' responsibility to "bear

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid., II, 81-82.

<sup>131</sup>Richardson, Theology of New Testament, p. 287.

witness" (John 15:27). Thus, believers are continually attempting to draw the world into this circle of mutual love. Also, the statements in I John about loving the brother are not limited to the Christian brother (e.g., I John 3:17).



## CHAPTER III

### SYSTEMATIC STATEMENT ON THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

Before any systematic discussion of love can take place intelligently, it is important that the meaning of the word be clearly in mind. Unfortunately, English has only one word for love which tends to make the meaning of the word ambiguous. Greek has at least four words for love. A brief definition of each will be helpful in emphasizing the various meanings love may have. "Epithemia" is desire that generally carries the connotation of impurity or lust. "Eros" is also desire; however, it is normally represented as desire (i.e., love) for the beautiful, true and good. It is aspiration for fulfillment of the soul's yearning. "Philia" is brotherly love in the broad sense of the term which means comradely and affectionate love of the brother and friends, or the ethical love of the neighbor. Finally, "agape," which in Greek is used for almost any love; it is a word with no specific coloring. However, in the New Testament, it is the

redeeming love of God shown in his action of forgiveness and redemption in Jesus Christ.

In actuality, I believe that it is impossible to separate the above words in that they tend to shade into each other. For example, we have discussed how the Old Testament used the love of a man and a woman to suggest the relationship of God to His people. The difficulty in specifically and finally defining each Greek word has historically and in our day raised great problems, especially in relationship to the distinction between eros and agape. Is the agape of the New Testament, the love of God for sinful man, totally and completely different from eros, man's love of the good and beautiful, as Anders Nygren's great book, Agape and Eros, so emphatically holds? Is Nygren correct in believing that agape and eros cannot mix any more than oil and water can? Or is Paul Tillich right in saying that: "If eros and agape cannot be united, agape toward God is impossible."<sup>1</sup> In other words, must agape and eros be related if human love is to reach its greatest expression?

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 281.

I believe that in these two statements lies a tension which Christian theology has attempted to come to terms with throughout the ages. Can desire (eros) have any role in or be related to a love that is spontaneous and unconditionally giving (agape)? To deal with this question, a brief summary of the Greek understanding of eros and the relationship of eros to the historical Christian use of agape will be outlined.

## HISTORICAL AND TRADITIONAL BACKGROUND

### Greek Heritage

The Greek, or more explicitly the Graeco-Roman thought had, as we shall see, a profound influence on Christian theology from the first century on. Graeco-Roman thinking had its foundation in the Greek city states of the 6th century B.C., and reached its climax in the Periclean Athens. It later gave the world Plato and Aristotle, spread its thought throughout the Mediterranean world, through the military power of Alexander, and merged into the Roman civilization of Augustus. Greek thought is centered around an understanding of the "cosmos," the organized state of things.

M. Yamunacharya gives a brief but helpful statement concerning the meaning of eros for four outstanding Greek figures:

Socrates does not hesitate to call himself 'erotikos' and an initiate of Eros; what he means is to indicate the deep love for a friend to whom he owes much gratitude. For Plato, it is the aspiration of the soul towards that true, perfect and absolute beauty and goodness, which is the culminating point of his philosophy. Aristotle extends this aspiration from the individual beings to the whole cosmos in a general teleology. Plotinus repeats the Platonic position: 'The natural love which the soul feels proves that God is there; this is why paintings and myths make Psyche the bride of Eros. Because the soul is different from God, and yet springs from him, she loves him of necessity; when it is yonder, she has the heavenly love, when she is here below the vulgar.' His whole scheme of ascetical purification is based on this concept of love as a natural movement innate in the soul towards its goal: 'It is natural for the soul to love God and to desire union with him, as the daughter of a noble father feels a noble love. But when descending to the world of generation, the soul, deceived by the false promises of a lover, exchanges its divine love for a mortal love, it is separated from its father and submits to indignities; but afterwards it is ashamed of these disorders and purifies itself and returns to its father and is happy.' Such passages in Plotinus show a certain similarity with Christian conceptions and make us sometimes suspect that he 'was deliberately formulating a counterblast in terms of Eros.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>J. Britto Chethimattam, "The Concept of Love in Catholic Thought," Religion and Society, X: 1 (March, 1963), 23.

Christian Tradition

There is no debate that Platonic thought had a decisive influence on the Patristic fathers. Their doctrine of love centers more on the Greek Philosophy of eros than on the God-man encounter of agape. All love is viewed as fundamentally the love of God as it is deposited in the heart of man. Origin speaks of the seeds of the love of God planted in the hearts of men by the creator of the universe.<sup>3</sup> St. Basil shows the influence of eros on his thinking by admitting that there is in man a natural inclination to love God and the neighbor.<sup>4</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite speaking about the nature of love and of the infinite goodness of God postulates a natural love of God apart from supernatural charity.<sup>5</sup> John Climacus in his Ladder of Divine Ascent believes there is a continuity between this natural love and the supernatural charity infused into us by God; hence, "if, as has been shown, love is a natural virtue in us, and is the bond and fulfillment

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

of the law, then it follows that the virtues are not far from nature."<sup>6</sup>

Augustine must be viewed as the first to succeed in striking a note of balance between the Greek and Hebrew conceptions of love. Augustine believes that man's will is the source of all good and evil.<sup>7</sup> It is the will that makes love good or evil: "He who resolves to love God, and to love his neighbor as himself, not according to man but according to God, is on account of this love said to be of a good will; and this is in Scripture more commonly called charity, but it is also even in the same books, called love."<sup>8</sup> "The right will is, therefore, well-directed love, and the wrong will is ill-directed love."<sup>9</sup>

Man's will or passionate desire is the result of God's giving us the right will. Unfortunately, Augustine distorts Paul in defending his own Neo-Platonic notions of man yearning for God. Augustine uses such lines as "who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:39)

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<sup>6</sup> John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent (London: Faber, 1959), p. 211 (step 26, n. 67).

<sup>7</sup> Aurelius Augustinus, The City of God (New York: Modern Library, 1950), chap. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., chap. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

to build his case. But he twists this statement to mean man's love for Christ rather than Christ's love for man. Augustine's favorite Pauline scripture is "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). He distorts this to mean man's (infused) love for God. "Now 'the love of God' is said to be shed abroad in our hearts, not because He loves us, but because He makes us lovers of Himself."<sup>10</sup> And yet, Paul's view should have been clear to Augustine, for Paul goes on to show that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). It is obvious that God's love is poured into our hearts because He loved us, not because we are lovers of Him by infusion. The problem is, as Nygren remarks, Augustine did not come to Christianity from Platonism, but he came to Christianity as a Platonist.<sup>11</sup>

As indicated above, man's will is determined by the initiation of God who comes to us. Thus, salvation which is the fulfillment of love does not have its source in

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<sup>10</sup>Aurelius Augustinus, "On Spirit and the Letters," in his Basic Writings (New York: Random House, 1948), p.508.

<sup>11</sup>Paul Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 127.

man's desire but it comes from God. Augustine understood the Incarnation as the divine act of love meeting man, and this act reverses the destructive direction which human eros had taken on its own.<sup>12</sup> It is as Daniel Day Williams explains:

The agape of God had come to us in a way which transcends our rational grasp and our human powers to respond. God's grace does what human power alone cannot do. Augustine's view of the way in which love does its work in the world is therefore a thorough going doctrine of grace. He does not deny that there is a movement toward God in our existence in so far as we are drawn in some way toward the source of our being. Grace answers man's search for truth and beauty. But the human search has fallen into disarray and obscurity. The power of God alone can revolutionize our orientation and set us on the straight path.<sup>13</sup>

It is this reality of grace which man grasps with faith. And faith would not be possible if love did not work beyond our deserving. Man is able to walk, although weakly, in the way of love because "the Way has come to us."<sup>14</sup>

This has been a brief sketch of Augustine's synthesis of eros and agape which he called "caritas." It is not until Thomas that any further monumental writings on

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<sup>12</sup>Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 61-62.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 63.



love take place; the synthesis made by Augustine was generally accepted by the succeeding ages without protest.

Thomas Aquinas saw two kinds of love; one of concupiscence and the other of friendship. In the former, a thing is loved not for itself, but for the sake of something else, and in the latter, the object is loved for its own goodness. Both of these tend towards eros for there is no sense in which the lover loves regardless of the quality of what is loved. Of the two loves, the love of friendship is the nobler: "The love with which a thing is loved that it may have some good is love simply while the love with which a thing is loved that it may be another's good is relative love."<sup>15</sup> "A friend is properly speaking, one to whom we wish good: while we are said to desire, what we wish for ourselves."<sup>16</sup>

Thomas relies heavily on Aristotle's teleology of nature with its stress on self-fulfillment. "The name love is given to the principle of movement towards the end

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," in his Basic Writings (New York: Random House, 1945), La, 2ae, q. 26, a 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Reply obj. 1.

loved," by Thomas.<sup>17</sup> By nature, each thing loves its own perfection; even God loves His own good.<sup>18</sup> The angels are drawn towards their own perfection and love it.<sup>19</sup> In man, Thomas as Augustine understands the will as that which encourages us to proper perfection.

On the other hand, love by nature implies an altruism, a going out of oneself towards the other. Will drives one to an object as it is, so to be united with it.<sup>20</sup> Thomas views this outgoing love as an expression of the universal teleology of nature by which each thing tends to its own proper end and through it to the ultimate good which is God.<sup>21</sup> Thus, all intellectual beings by nature love God above all, since God is the adequate object of the intellectual faculty.<sup>22</sup> This is the fundamental law of all

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., La, 2ae, q. 26, a 1.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., I, q. 20, a 1.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., I, Q. 60, a 1.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 2a, 3ae, q. 27, a 4.

<sup>21</sup>Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Contra," in Ibid.; Gentiles III, cc. 16-20.

<sup>22</sup>Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," I, q. 62.

finite beings that only find fulfillment in the Infinite, and all love is thus a tendency for union with the ultimate.

Nygren gives an excellent summary of Thomas' position to the point that we have discussed it:

For Thomas, as for Augustine, all love is fundamentally acquisitive love; love corresponds to the acquisitive will, and this latter to the natural quest for happiness. As surely as everyone loves himself and wants his own happiness, so surely must everyone be disposed, by nature and in accordance with reason (which Augustine emphasizes more than Thomas), to love God above all things. Self-love properly understood must drive us to love God who, as the highest good, includes all that concerns our happiness. The reason why we love God at all is that we need Him as our bonum; indeed, Thomas does not hesitate to say: 'Assuming what is impossible, that God were not man's bonum, then there would be no reason for man to love Him.' He agrees with Augustine, that whoever does not love God does not understand how rightly to love himself. . . . Like him (Augustine), Thomas aims in his theological work at producing a unified view of Christianity subsumed under love. His basic idea can be summarized in two sentences: (1) everything in Christianity can be traced back to love; and (2) everything in love can be traced back to self-love. The idea that there is no other love than self-love is already included at the point where Thomas's doctrine of love begins, inasmuch as he asserts that man can love only that which denotes a good for himself ('bonum suum').<sup>23</sup>

Thus far, there has been an over-emphasis upon love in Thomas as present in man's desire. Thomas does emphasize

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<sup>23</sup>Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 642-644.

that the will of fulfilling desire causes man to do certain acts. It is true that Thomas writes, 'Man attains blessedness by a series of acts which are called merits,'<sup>24</sup> but this should not imply that there is no significance in divine grace or that man is responsible for his own salvation. On the contrary, he emphatically rejects the idea that man could acquire "blessedness" (as in pure eros) by his own strength.<sup>25</sup> For Thomas there is no contradiction between the idea of grace and the idea of merit, but each is a condition of the other. Man must do meritorious acts; however, they are impossible unless one has the aid of divine grace. "Without grace, no merit"--this is the basic view of Mediaeval theology, which in the main upholds the Augustinian principle: "when God crowns our merits, it is nothing but His own gifts that He crowns." Human merits are only seen, by both Thomas and Augustine, as effects proceeding from divine grace. Thus to accuse Mediaeval theology of Pelagianism as Protestant historians of dogma have often done, is to be unfair.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," II, q.5, a 5.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., II, q.5, a 5.

<sup>26</sup>Nygren, op. cit., p. 622.

Thus we can see that Augustine's original synthesis of eros and agape (i.e., caritas) has generally been carried through Mediaeval theology.

In turning to the Reformation, there are some obvious contrasts to Augustine and Thomas that may be presented. The church had claimed to be the possessor of grace, and also to hold the correct interpretation of salvation as merited by the good works of men in response to God's prevenient grace. Specifically speaking, the deep chasm between the Reformers and the Mediaeval conception of grace can be seen as follows: the latter sees grace as a means for man's ascent, but the former does not recognize any such ascent. Fellowship with God from the Roman Catholic perspective is viewed as fellowship on God's level, when the Reformer saw such fellowship on man's level. In the Mediaeval case, grace is divine assistance which enables man to reach God; while Luther understood it as the gracious condescension of God. In the Mediaeval period, grace and fellowship with God are two different things; grace is the means, fellowship with God is the end. Grace and fellowship coincided for the Reformers. Grace being God's gracious will by which he enters into

fellowship with sinful man. Augustine and Thomas understood grace as a quality given to man by God, but Luther sees it as the good pleasure of God under which man lives in unearned justification. Finally, the distinction which we have been making throughout this chapter is present: Mediaeval theology saw grace as the power which sets in motion man's upward-directed love, his eros; in the Reformers, grace is the same as pure agape given by God.<sup>27</sup>

The above comparison points out two major aspects of the Reformation theology of love, both of which rest in the Reformers' understanding of love as shown above (i.e., grace equals God's agape). The first aspect indicated is a negative one. Luther had a violent reaction against the use of "reason" for he saw speculative reason as a defiance of the theology of merit and good works:

Therefore, they (the scholastics) attribute acceptation to good works; that is to say, that God doth accept our works, not of duty indeed, but of congruence. Contrariwise we, excluding all works, do go to the very head of this beast which is called Reason, which is the fountain and hear spring of all mischiefs. For reason feareth not God, it loveth not God, it trusteth not in God, but proudly condemneth him . . .

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 624-625.

Luther then goes on to say that this pestilent beast, this harlot, should be "killed by the faith."<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, the Reformers shift the emphasis away from man's attempt to love God and emphasize that God loves man through His grace. Thus, we are left with the question as to who the Reformers believed man should love. Luther emphasized that faith must become effectual through love, resulting in services cheerfully rendered to one's fellow-man. Even as Christ became a dutiful servant to all men, so the Christ must become "a Christ to his neighbor." "I will therefore," he wrote, "give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered Himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ."<sup>29</sup>

Luther strongly believed that it is possible to live with agape in the midst of the world. He believed, and Calvin agreed, that there is a correct way in which the things of this world may be used, and that every man is

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 733-734.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 737.

called by God to respond in faith and love to every situation in which he finds himself.<sup>30</sup> It must be said, however, that the Reformers did not deal with the complexities of a modern society in discussing how one should respond in faith and love. Their ethic was not developed to a degree that would allow for practical application in today's world.

Nygren believed that Luther has recovered the pure motif of agape against all synthesis with eros. Luther sets the agape of God sharply off against all human loves. Its character is its gracious outgoing, not only to the desirable or lovely, but to whatever need is present. Nygren sees this as an obvious counterthrust to Augustine's "fruition of love" in God.

All that can be called Agape derives from God. From above his love comes down to us, and it must pass on through us to our neighbour. 'Amor crucis ex cruce natus' does not seek its own; and it has also left behind the idea of 'fruitio.'<sup>31</sup>

Nygren thus uses his doctrine of the contrasting motifs of eros and agape to point to what is distinctive in the Reformation conception of love, but he errs, it seems to

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<sup>30</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>31</sup>Nygren, op. cit., p. 736.



me, in insisting that this is the only possible interpretation of love that expresses the New Testament conception. Nygren argues that Christian love was diluted and not really Christian until Luther re-instated "pure agape." There is good reason to doubt that such an extreme claim can be supported.

### CONTEMPORARY THINKING

In contemporary times, we once again can see that the definition of Christian love is dependent upon the way in which eros relates, or does not relate, to agape. Nygren's great work stresses that any synthesis of eros and agape is not "pure agape," which is pure Christian love. There are some serious questions to be raised against Nygren. This will be done in the remainder of this chapter, as well as explaining my own understanding of Christian love. Much of my position has its foundation in the writings of Daniel Day Williams (esp. The Spirit and the Forms of Love).

In order to understand my position, it must be seen in the light of Anders Nygren. Therefore, the next several

paragraphs will be devoted to giving a general picture of his position.

Contemporary discussions of Christian love as a response to the divine initiative have been greatly influenced by Anders Nygren in his book Agape and Eros. He compares two theories of love; one steeped in the Greek tradition, and the other founded in the Christian tradition. According to Nygren, these two approaches are radically different and unrelated in any way. Christianity by bringing the idea of agape, or self-giving love, into a situation dominated by eros, or self-regarding love, brought a fundamental revolution to both religion and morality. Nygren holds that the consequences of this revolution were hidden (especially with Augustine) and were not appreciated or understood by the Christian community until the Reformation. Luther once again restores the Scriptures understanding of "pure agape."

It is essential to understand the sharp distinction which Nygren draws between agape and eros, but at the same time it is important to not over-simplify the distinction. Eros, which Nygren frequently defines as "self-regarding" love cannot be viewed as only earthly and sensual. This is

also apparent in Aristotle, the neo-Platonists, and in the Greek mystery religions. "Eros is an appetite, a yearning desire, which is aroused by the attractive qualities of its object; and in eros-love, man seeks God in order to satisfy his spiritual hunger by the possession and enjoyment of the Divine perfections."<sup>32</sup>

Agape, on the other hand, begins in God and moves downward toward man. It changes the emphasis of both Jewish legal piety and Hellenistic morality because of the belief that God loves the sinner as well as the man who fulfills the law. It is also opposed to the piety of Greek religion because the idea of a god who loves lower creatures unconditionally contradicts the idea of gods who in their perfection live above the changing flux of human existence. Nygren thus argues convincingly that all the dimensions of God's love, neighborly love, love for God, and self-love are transformed in Agape.

Nygren devised a list of the distinctions between what he considers two unrelatable forms of love:

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. viii.

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| Eros is acquisitive desire and longing.   | Agape is sacrificial giving.   |
| Eros is an upward movement.   | Agape comes down.  |
| Eros is man's way to God.   | Agape is God's way to man.   |
| Eros is man's effort: it assumes that man's salvation is his own work.  | Agape is God's grace: salvation is the work of Divine love.  |
| Eros is egocentric love, a form of self-assertion of the highest, noblest, sublimest kind.                                    | Agape is unselfish love, it 'seeketh not its own', it gives itself away.   |
| Eros seeks to gain its life, a life divine, immortalized.   | Agape lives the life of God, therefore dares to 'love it.'   |
| Eros is the will to get and possess which depends on want and need.   | Agape is freedom in giving, which depends on wealth and plenty.  |
| Eros is primarily man's love; God is the object of eros. Even when it is attributed to God, eros is patterned on human love.  | Agape is primarily God's love; 'God is agape.' Even when it is attributed to man, agape is patterned on Divine love.                           |
| Eros is determined by the quality, the beauty and the worth, of its object; it is not spontaneous, but 'evoked,' 'motivated.' | Agape is sovereign in relation to its object, and is directed to both 'the evil and the good; it is spontaneous, 'overflowing,' 'unmotivated.' |
| Eros recognizes value in its object--and loves it.  | Agape loves--and creates value in its object. <sup>33</sup>  |

Nygren supports God's grace as decisive for and the initiator of Christian love:

For agape it is precisely God's love, God's agape, that is both the criterion and the source of all that can be called Christian love. This Divine love, of which the distinctive feature is freedom in giving has its direct continuation in Christian neighbourly

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

love, which having received everything freely from God is prepared also to give freely. Here, therefore, we have no need to try to make room for neighbourly love, nor to find any external motivation for it. It is God's own agape which seeks to make its way out into the world through the Christian as its channel.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, agape is a spontaneous, unmotivated love that comes to sinful man. Man has no inherent worth that gives him a claim to the love of God, either before or after he receives it. God has given Himself in Christ and has made possible salvation which man was incapable of attaining on his own. Because of this, Nygren concludes that God loves "irrationally."

Nygren believes that in the change that comes with agape, fellowship with God is central. Man's fellowship with his neighbor is a derivative of fellowship with God. Ethical standards do not come from abstractly discussing "what is good?" but rather from the relationship of the believer to God. This relationship is responsible for both motivation and judgment in the ethical realm. Nygren fails to deal adequately with how one determines if one's judgment is correct in a complex situation, except to say that such a responsibility is God's and not man's. Nygren felt

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 218.

that Augustine diluted the radical character of agape with his "caritas" in that self-love was a part of Christian virtue. As we have seen earlier, Nygren believes that it is Luther who draws Christianity back to the correct understanding of agape and hence right fellowship with God.

Speaking of Luther's views, Nygren says:

He (Luther) is perfectly aware that the love he has described is no human love. 'For such love is not a natural art, nor grown in our garden.' Christian love is not produced by us, but has come to us from heaven. The subject of Christian love is not man, but God Himself, yet in such a way that the Divine love employs man as its instrument and organ. The Christian is set between God and his neighbour. In faith he receives God's love, in love he passes it on to his neighbour. Christian love is, so to speak, the extension of God's love. The Christian is not an independent centre of power alongside of God. The love which he can give is only that which he has received from God. Christian love is through and through a Divine work.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, Nygren agrees with Luther in saying there is no goodness apart from relationship to God. There is no autonomy, as in Kant, which can determine goodness without relationship to God; no "caritas," as in Augustine, which allows for human self-love; no natural human love even if it has its base in God. Nygren believes that apart from man's relationship to God, a relationship initiated and preserved

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 733f.

by God, there is no goodness in the Christian understanding of the term.

It seems to me that Nygren overstates certain valid tendencies in agape to a point where any positive relationship to human striving and ideals is greatly obscured if not eliminated altogether. I am not original in this thought which is supported by the great Roman Catholic author, M. C. D'Arch, as well as Paul Tillich, D. D. Williams, and many others.

One of the consequences of Nygren's interpretation is that since agape is given to an object that is not worthy of it, the Christian cannot really be said to have agape toward God. The whole conception of man's love to God becomes unclear. Because of some New Testament expressions, notably the First commandment emphasized by Jesus, Nygren must recognize man's love to God, but he does so only in a secondary sense, and the precise meaning of it remains clouded. If salvation results in fellowship with God and man, I would think it would be difficult to see that this could mean other than mutual love (i.e., communion) in some sense between man and God.

Joseph Sittler reminds us that the Old Testament and the work of Christ portrayed God's concern for Israel both in God's "will-to-restoration" for man, and the action of Him who "assaults man" in holy love. The lives of man and God are so related that nothing but misunderstanding can result from treating them separately from each other. As we have seen in the earlier biblical studies, God is active in the process of decision and response about ethical matters.<sup>36</sup> Hence, mutual love seems to be essential to the relationship between man and God. Nygren agrees to the importance of relationship, but he is vague as to how positive relationship takes place.

Closely related to this is Nygren's view that man cannot even want to be found or saved by God. For if one were to desire fellowship with God, it would be an ego-centric desire and the consequences would be that man would be separated from God by the very fact of desiring to find Him. It is difficult to see what Nygren would do with many of the teachings of Jesus, including, "blessed are those

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<sup>36</sup>Joseph Sittler, The Structure of Christian Ethics (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), p. 25.



who do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled."

Nygren is unwilling to recognize sufficiently the Biblical message of God's justice. He seems to carry his argument to the extreme when he says, "God's attitude to men is not characterized by 'justitia distributiva,' but by 'agape,' not by retributive righteousness, but by freely giving and forgiving love."<sup>37</sup> Although there is a degree of truth in his statement, he carries it so far that any Christian justice becomes an impossibility and a contradiction of the nature of God. However, the Christian faith has always maintained some type of tension between God's love and justice. There is a separation between good and evil, regardless of how complex the relation between mercy and justice may be.

Nygren believes that agape is "irrational" and yet he has placed a great deal of stress upon the importance of the relationship between God and man. Although it is impossible to refute an irrational doctrine, it must also be said that such a doctrine cannot have a significant relationship to human experience. Nygren has once again set

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<sup>37</sup>Nygren, op. cit., p. 70.

forth a truth but carried it to such a degree that it becomes a "reductio ad absurdum" of the truth.

Daniel Day Williams is very much aware of the importance and greatness of Nygren's work. Nygren's book is so monumental that Williams believes "if we can show where Nygren's analysis has gone astray, we shall be on the way toward finding a more adequate interpretation of agape."<sup>38</sup> Williams goes on to outline what I also believe is Nygren's "fundamental error." Nygren's fundamental error is his arbitrary exclusiveness. He makes two assumptions which are the basis of his error, one having to do with theological method and the other with his understanding of the structure of love.

As to method, Nygren assumes that the basic motif of any faith must be exclusive of the motifs of other faiths. This assumption that what is significant in Christianity must be the exclusive possession of Christianity runs all through the contemporary revival of reformation theology . . . Nygren claims, of course, simply to be setting forth scientifically the fundamental Christian motif without arguing its truth or value against any other motif. But actually to set for a doctrine of salvation with the assertion that this alone is Christianity and everything else a corruption of Christianity, makes a work polemical throughout. He does admit that quite possibly it was only through

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<sup>38</sup>Daniel Day Williams, God's Grace and Man's Hope (New York: Harper & Bros., 1949), p. 70.

the conjoining of agape with elements of nomos and eros that agape could have made its way into the experience of man. But this admission in itself would certainly tend to suggest that there is more organic bond between agape, nomos, and eros than he strictly allows.<sup>39</sup>

The second aspect of Nygren's error of arbitrary exclusiveness in his methodology is made with respect to the structure of love.

He (Nygren) assumes that love must be either purely egocentric or completely spontaneous and unmotivated, when actually all love does combine the desire of the self with the good of the other . . . Nygren overlooks the fact that the relationship between man and his neighbor and between man and God is fundamentally a social relationship in which the good of one actually does become the good of the other. Nygren regards the medieval doctrine of love as friendship (*amor amicitiae*) as a curious and invalid attempt to allow for the unselfish element in love. But if man is a social creature there is nothing curious or invalid about the doctrine that I can unselfishly enjoy my neighbor's good.<sup>40</sup>

Nygren seems to feel that it is a contradiction to allow God's power to be primary while at the same time man possesses a measure of creative freedom in himself. Interpreting Luther, Nygren says, "the Christian is not an independent center of power alongside of God . . . He has nothing of his own to give. He is merely the tube, the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-71.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-72.

channel, through which God's love flows."<sup>41</sup> He eliminates any human responsibility, and yet, it seems to me that one of the essential marks of Christian love is that it allows power to the objects of love. This is the case throughout the scriptures.

This criticism of Nygren must be careful not to negate the greatness of his work, nor to shade over the valid purpose for Nygren's writing. It is Nygren's goal to "unmask the secret disguises of selfishness through the light of the love of God which seeketh not its own." This is the heart of the message that Nygren is enabling us to recover. The problem of man, however, is not that agape stands outside his desires, but that when sinful man desires he tends to corrupt the spirit of love. It is with this truth, that man in his desire tends to corrupt the spirit of love, that Christian theology must continually struggle.

### LOVE AND THE INCARNATION

In this section, I am attempting to make my own thinking on Christian love clearer. I have chosen to use

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<sup>41</sup>Nygren, op. cit., pp. 735-736.

the Incarnation as the doctrine through which I express my beliefs. I am using the Incarnation because I believe it is the event through which the "spirit of love" is best and most fully communicated.

To speak of the possibility of sinful and selfish man living and acting within the "spirit of love" in a Christian context is to speak of the Incarnation. For, as has been shown in the previous chapter, it is through the Incarnation that we come to understand fully the spirit of love that "seeketh not its own." To understand love in the Christian tradition is to realize what God has done in Jesus Christ. It seems to me that regardless of the way the mystery of the Incarnation is understood, there is one thing that must remain uniform: God's being is love and our human situation cries out for restoration and fulfillment of life in love. In Christ, God has healed the human spirit which allows for new possibilities of free living which lives life to its utmost without total selfishness.

If love constitutes God's being, and if man is by nature in the image of God in that he loves God, others and himself, "then the key to man's being and to God's being is the capacity for free, self-giving mutuality and concern

for the other."<sup>42</sup> This, it will become clear, is the foundation for my fundamental convictions concerning the Incarnation.

In Chapter 2, we noted the distinction the Old Testament makes between God's *ahabah* by which he elects and establishes a covenant with His people, and His *chesed*, which is compassion, forgiveness and redemptive concern for a people who were not always faithful. We have seen that both these aspects of divine love are also present in the New Testament account of the Incarnation. God's election-love is to His Son, and through the Son, we are all called to abundant life. There is an ancient theological discussion asking if God would have become Incarnate if there were no sin. Thomas Aquinas finds this view attractive, but concludes on biblical grounds that because of sin it was necessary for the Word to be made man. But he adds immediately, "And yet the power of God is not limited to this; - - even had sin not existed, God 'could' have become incarnate."<sup>43</sup> It is in the Incarnation that we see the

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<sup>42</sup>Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love, p. 160.

<sup>43</sup>Thomas Aquinas, op. cit., III, q. 1, a. 3.

purpose of creation fulfilled. It expresses God's creative will to raise up man and establish His Kingdom.<sup>44</sup>

Obviously, the history of God's creation has been invaded by sin. To understand the Incarnation is, in part, to see God taking on the burden of sin. Paul believes Christ was made sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21). The love God expresses in the Incarnation is love that was willing to meet the needs of the situation. Divine love became a suffering redemptive love for the sake of man. The form of love (the Incarnation) has met the needs of man.<sup>45</sup>

Thus far, we have seen the Incarnation as the action of God's prevenient grace. To understand the union of God and man is difficult in that Jesus' humanity often tends to become a mere form or appearance. This is perhaps the most difficult issue in all Christian theology.

I agree with Williams who interprets the Incarnation as "the relation between God and Jesus (that) is determined by love."<sup>46</sup> The union of God and man in Jesus Christ is seen as communion of God with the man Jesus.

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<sup>44</sup>Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love, p. 161.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

Such a communion takes place in the freedom of love. God in His grace has created a humanity which has the freedom to become related and committed to Him. This communion when realized in history is immersed in the mystery of God's love. It is Jesus who, as understood in the experience of the church, is the "human exemplifier of the spirit of God."<sup>47</sup>

The dynamics and quality of Jesus' witness to God's love is expressed beautifully in a rather lengthy quote from Williams:

. . . As Jesus witnessed to God's love he experienced the risks, dilemmas and decisions of a real human being, living and growing in a particular culture with its political and religious situation. His mind was shaped by the tradition he inherited, and his language communicated in the forms which were appropriate and available in that time and place. He lived as a man, in dependence upon God, his mind open to the question of God's purpose for Him, wrestling with the temptations of human flesh and knowing all of them. His interpretation of his vocation to serve God could grow and could be altered by new experience. He could believe God would do certain things which did not happen as he expected. Whatever special powers he had, he found limits set to them. However clearly he preached his message, and however powerful his spirit of love to persuade and to win men, he encountered opposition, misunderstanding and hatred. He experienced human love in his family and for his companions. He wept and grieved with them and rejoiced with them.

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 161-162.



He knew that his life ran toward death, and that he could be killed. It also follows that Jesus' life was remembered in the human way. The record of his life exhibits the accidents and vagaries of human tradition-making. He has been understood and misunderstood in innumerable ways. Men have debated whether he existed or not. Such is the human condition and the risk of love's work in it.

If the things just bluntly said sound strange, it is because in spite of the Church's clear assertion of Jesus' humanity, and in spite of the New Testament record, we may find it harder to think clearly of his humanity than of his deity. The reason for this lies deep in a misunderstanding about the impassibility of the love of God which has shaped our tradition for centuries.<sup>48</sup>

In the Gospels, we see a continual picture of Jesus' dependence upon God in his never-ceasing acts of prayer and devotion, a life style the Apostle Paul challenges us to "imitate." Such a life style does not negate, but increases human freedom, for one is no longer bound to his own appetite and yet one's own desires are realized. Perhaps in prayer the freedom of Jesus reaches its deepest point for Jesus totally opens Himself to God here, protests to God (e.g., the garden), seeks the will of God, acknowledges dependence upon God.<sup>49</sup> Such an Incarnation did not negate human freedom but fulfilled it. Man is no longer

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 162-163.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

bound to selfishness and in the eyes of God there is a positive worth of human effort.

The New Testament presents a picture of continuous communion and honesty between the Father and the Son. This is what is meant by the assertion that Jesus is sinless. Those who heard Jesus heard of the meaning of life in unbroken communion with God. Sin, it should be said, is not primarily understood as particular acts of human weakness or failure, but it is the severing of communion between God and man. Jesus shows us the meaning of life where such communion remains unbroken.<sup>50</sup> It is not unchristian for man to desire to be in such a communion as Nygren and others would have us believe. Freedom for communion is real in both man and God because of God's love. I believe the Incarnation emphasizes this point rather than negating it.

Through the Incarnation, history has experienced a new creation. The entire New Testament speaks of a "new Being" in the Incarnation (even Paul with his belief in Christ as the eternally-begotten Son). This new act of creation has its final and most powerful sign in the

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

Resurrection. In the Risen Christ, the themes of election-love and covenant are fused. Williams writes, "The redemptive action which expresses God's forgiveness and His will to reconcile sinful man to Himself is at the same time the expression of God's election of His Son and all those joined to Him through the power of incarnate love."<sup>51</sup>

It is clear that election underlies the eternal purpose of love, and it also is present in the will to create a new covenant when the old has been broken. The mystery of love can thus be said to encompass both creation and redemption. It is from the context of redemption that the New Testament speaks of a new creation. Thus for man to have faith in the Resurrection is to have faith in the spirit of love that was incarnate in Jesus and that has created "new being(s)." This new life trust in God and has hope (desire) for eternal communion with Him. Because of love, the "new being" has "put on Christ."

The next question is obvious and extremely important. What is the ethical stance of a new being toward his fellowman? How does a life in communion with God affect one's relationship to his fellow human beings?

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

We have earlier mentioned that the problem of man loving is not that he desires, but that when sinful man desires he tends to corrupt the spirit of love. This is especially true in man's relation to his neighbors. Thus, man's love, if it is not to corrupt the spirit of love, has to become as God's love. At the same time, there must not be a loss of human freedom or the positive worth of human effort in the sight of God is gone as well as the right of man to choose his own actions. Eros may, therefore, become a positive quality of agape if it is not corrupted by selfishness.

Before discussing the humanitarian role of agape, it is important to distinguish between the "human loves" and "agape." The term agape refers to the self-giving and forgiving love which God has expressed so decisively in the world through His redemptive activity in Jesus. Human love refers to all human experiences of organic feeling and sympathetic attachment for things and persons in the world. Such love includes self-love.<sup>52</sup>

Human loves are not to be seen as an either/or in relationship to agape. For all human loves (i.e., sexual

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

love, comradely love, humanitarian love and the religious love of the good and beautiful)<sup>53</sup> are a part of a person who is fulfilled. Although these loves are transformed by self-giving agape, they still must continue to be, for they are essential to personal life and its fulfillment.

Agape is not a contradiction of human loves and the human desires that go with them. However, agape is not the same as human love and it cannot be said that human loves move toward agape in a simple and direct manner. But, there are two ways in which human loves can be understood as a preparation for agape: (1) Human loves may open the self up and thus begin to show the value of self-giving; (2) Human loves upon reaching the limit of self-fulfillment, prepare an individual for the realization that only a love which transcends the human loves can truly fulfill the self.<sup>54</sup>

The way in which agape functions in relation to humanitarian love will now be dealt with. How does God's love function as our love in relation to our fellowman?

Agape can incorporate humanitarianism, but it also transcends it. The reason for this is to be found in the

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

history of sin and graceful love. Williams writes, "Agape is identification with the neighbor and meeting his needs, but it is identification at the level of confession of our betrayal of the divine image, and hope for the possibility of renewal through the grace of suffering love." As has been discussed, such agape is revealed to us most definitely in the Incarnation. Therefore, agape, while including sympathy, fellow-feeling and identification, also has a new basis from which to become identified with the other. The new basis is that we participate in a love which has unconditionally given itself for sinners. "To believe that 'every man is the brother for whom Christ died,' requires an identification with the neighbour which is deeper than any humanitarian sentiment, for now the neighbour is seen as one who is created to share in communion with God and his fellows in eternal life."<sup>55</sup> It is indeed sad when one feels that agape implies a superiority over others and that it somehow makes one better to have experienced God's redemptive love. For agape really means just the opposite, that we confessionally believe that each stands in the same need of grace as every other one does.

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

It is readily recognized that Christianity does not have a monopoly on discovering the love of God. It is admitted that love for God and man may be recognized and practiced by those who profess no biblical faith. As Reinhold Niebuhr has said in his classic The Nature and Destiny of Man:

While Christians rightly believe that all truth necessary for such a spiritual experience is mediated only through the revelation in Christ, they must guard against the assumption that only those who know Christ 'after the flesh,' that is, in actual historical revelation, are capable of such a conversion. A 'hidden Christ' operates in history. And there is always the possibility that those who do not know the historical revelation may achieve a more genuine repentance and humility than those who do.<sup>56</sup>

This does not mean that we should conclude that historical revelation is of little or no importance. On the contrary, those who have recognized the agape of God through biblical revelation can be thankful it has come to them in that way, while remaining aware that they do not have exclusive possession of the truth.

But, agape gives a depth and vitality to our human loves, and is not opposed to them. Man's love of home,

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<sup>56</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), II, 109-110.

work, soil, tradition and history, comradeship of community, freedom, group spirit, indignation at injustice, and others are all affirmed within the biblical ethic of agape. The ethical work of agape in relation to the human loves can be seen in both protest and affirmation.

As Paul Tillich said, "Protest is a form of communion."<sup>57</sup> Williams expounds on this when he writes:

Agape creates that freedom of spirit which transcends all self-justification. Thus the moral life receives from agape that which is essential to its integrity, the transcendent dimension in which the limits of our ethical justification can be confessed without our falling into nihilism and despair. Agape leads to the radical protest against the underlying sins of society and culture in which we share.<sup>58</sup>

Thus it is in the struggle for justice that one of the manifestations of Christian love is seen. "The church is not the only group in which man is moved by agape and seeks its leading; but it is the one community which is accepting agape as the meaning of its existence places itself squarely under the judgment of the love which seeks one redeemed humanity in the Kingdom of God."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Tillich, op. cit., I, 38.

<sup>58</sup>Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love, p. 264.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 275.



Closely connected to love bringing justice is the role of self-giving by persons. For without care that stimulates self-giving there would be much less change. The ultimate issue in self-giving is "giving for what?" Historically, man has given himself for a multitude of things, both good and bad, creative and destructive. Men have given their lives for fame, money, infatuation, homeland, religion, dogmas, prejudices, etc. But when sacrifice of self is done in agape, it challenges all claims for self-giving but one. Agape does not seek to remove human loves, but it transmutes them by giving them a new context. Agape challenges the claim to absoluteness by any human love ("He who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me.") Agape allows men to change their understanding of life so that all human loves participate in a love that is greater by nature than the human loves.

Human loves are now understood from a new perspective. Agape is not just another love on a list, nor is it a contradiction of human loves. But it underlies all other loves, leads them to discover their potential, and releases new possibilities in the self which finds fullness in communion.

"Agape is the affirmation of life, the forgiveness of sins, the spirit in which the self can give itself away and yet be fulfilled."<sup>60</sup> Hence, it remains possible to affirm the self-denial in agape and yet preserve the creative significance of human loves and affirm life and desire to have it abundantly. The great mystery of love is not, however, that it can bring about self-denial, but "the capacity in every love to learn self-giving and thus within the vital impulses of creaturely existence to prepare for the claim of God upon the spirit." It is impossible for human love by its own power to direct one toward the Kingdom of God. However, human love does have the potential to do the work of the Kingdom when it comes to full self-understanding, i.e., when it recognizes that it is centered in and transformed by agape.<sup>61</sup>

There is one final aspect of agape that is essential to its full meaning. The scriptures have shown how it is impossible to understand completely agape until it has done all its work (I Corinthians 13). Thus, agape must be seen through the eyes of hope, a hope transformed in that it looks to the future with a faith in agape. Without this

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

eschatological dimension in love, we do not see it as it is. Love is marked by a willingness to wait for consumation, not an uncontrollable desire to seize it. And yet, there is an assurance concerning the future for agape has overcome the fear of death and defeat. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God." But what love will do in the future can only be known partially in history until the "end."

We have emphasized that the greatest and decisive expression of agape has been seen in Jesus. It has also been said that what God expressed in him has yet to come to an end (I Corinthians 15). God is still working in history to reconstitute it as His love becomes our love, but this is a process and not a completed act.<sup>62</sup> As man is filled with the spirit of agape the full meaning of "He who saveth his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake and the Gospel will save it" becomes clear. Truly God came to man to "save" man and to give him life "more abundantly."

To summarize, the divine agape acted uniquely in Jesus. This same agape can act in all men through God's

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

spirit. The choice to live with or without relationship to the love of God is man's in every moment of his existence. This is not to say that if he chooses to live with agape he will be exactly like Jesus, for agape works in and through personality, and each personality is unique. Jesus has decisively revealed, more than any other person, the full meaning of living in communion with God because of agape. He confronts each person with a need to choose whether he will live with the love of God or without it.

## CHAPTER IV

### CHRISTIAN LOVE AND ERICH FROMM'S HUMANISM

Erich Fromm believes that all men face the fundamental question of how to overcome separateness and isolation, and achieve union. Man is ultimately in control of himself, and his goal is to find union with others and nature which will result in meaning for his life. The Christian faith does not deny that man desires to live in communion and oneness with others. In fact, Fromm's description of alienation in the first chapter is not dissimilar from the biblical understanding of sin. The basic difference between Fromm and Christian theology is whether the grace of God is needed to bring unity and fullness to man's life. This is the basic difference between the humanism of Fromm and a Christian humanism which can be described as "graceful humanism."

Fromm's humanism places man ultimately in control of himself and thus totally responsible for reaching his goal in life. In the Christian faith, man is not really trying to perfect his life as Fromm is. He is not attempting to fulfill all his potentialities as Fromm believes he

should do. This is not to say that these things are evil and that the Christian does not have such striving.

Rather, it means that the life of faith is not founded in such striving. I am also not saying the opposite, that men in faith just "wait around" for God to save them, or rejoice in the midst of the world's misery because they have been saved.<sup>1</sup>

What I am saying is that Christian faith sees life as a response to God's grace which has seized and shaken man and yet blessed him in Jesus Christ. Grace shows a potential for the human loves that man otherwise would not even be aware existed. Hence, H. Richard Niebuhr concludes that man is not so much the maker (artificer or goal seeker) or the law obeyer (the disciplined citizen) as the responder, "the responsible self." He is "man-the-answerer, man engaged in dialogue, man acting in response to action upon him."<sup>2</sup> Fromm, on the other hand, believes that the individual must be the initiator in any love relationship. To rely on anything outside of man is to

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<sup>1</sup>Roger Shinn, Man the New Humanism (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 176-177.

<sup>2</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 56.

have a false faith. There can be no transcendent grace to which man responds, because man is alone and his existence is an accident. Hence, any meaning in life must come from the source of man himself.

Because Christianity believes man is a responder, Fromm says the Christian faith has restrained man's freedom to act and repressed productive love. His criticism is especially directed at the Protestant Reformers:

Luther's relationship to God was one of complete submission. In psychological terms his concept of faith means: if you completely submit, if you accept your individual insignificance, then the all-powerful God may be willing to love you and save you. If you get rid of your individual self with all its shortcomings and doubts by utmost self-effacement, you free yourself from the feeling of your own nothingness and can participate in God's glory.<sup>3</sup>

Fromm sees man's hope in discovering the powers of productive love within himself. Man must overcome the distortions and illusions brought on by relying on God's grace and love. He must be "man for himself." For Fromm to hold such a viewpoint, it is necessary for him to have a very high opinion concerning man's nature.

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<sup>3</sup>Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941), p. 81.

It is helpful that in Fromm's recent book, The Heart of Man, Its Genius for Good and Evil, he attempts to answer the criticisms of his optimistic view of man.<sup>4</sup> He traces human evil to some factor in a person's life that blocks normal activity. The temptations present in freedom, its anxieties and insecurities, and the possibility for self-corruption are all admitted by Fromm. And yet, man's fulfillment still comes through one's self-development. It is at this point he feels Christianity has failed for it relies on grace for man's fulfillment. He writes, ". . .It is only too natural that he (man) seek for an 'absolute' which gives him the illusion of certainty and relieves him from conflict, doubt and responsibility."<sup>5</sup> In Fromm's eyes, there is no god, neither in theological, philosophical or historical garments, that has the capability of saving or condemning man. Man alone is responsible for finding and realizing a goal for life. It is impossible to discover any ultimately saving answers, but

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<sup>4</sup>Erich Fromm, The Heart of Man, Its Genius for Good and Evil (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 81.

<sup>5</sup>Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962), p. 44.



man can strive for depth and clarity of experience which enables him to live without illusion, and, hence, to live in freedom.

The Christian views life as a gift, not as an accident of reality that must be dealt with. A foundational difference between Fromm and a Christian conscience is, therefore, that the Judeo-Christian vision of reality lies in its vision of the world as creation. The creation idea is a basic foundation for the Christian's interpretation of the world, history and man's self-hood.<sup>6</sup> Through creation, God has chosen to live in communion with man. It is in a free loving response to the love offered that man realizes the fullness of what it is to be human.

Life is a gift in that it possesses freedom. In the previous chapter, I have explained why the Christian is free in his relationship to God rather than bound to God in a false security as Fromm sees it. The Christian is not pre-occupied or captivated by an attempt to perfect himself (a way in which Fromm is not free), but his life is free to respond to needs and opportunities that call for a loving

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<sup>6</sup> John Cobb, Jr., God and the World (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 120.

response. As we have seen in our discussion of the scriptures, man recognizes a compelling call, yet he is able to respond to it with spontaneity and, therefore, with freedom. Related to the response is man's desire for relationship and communion. Thus, man is partially responsible for his own human development. And it is grace that allows human development to freely reach a depth that is not otherwise possible, for all human loves are transformed in agape.

Roger Shinn has called the Christian faith a "graceful humanism" because it is a response to a gracious loving gift, including the gift of existence itself. One lives life grateful for the love of God; life begins with a love relationship rather than in a search for love. A grateful life combines appreciation of and discontent with the world, society, and even oneself. Life does not consist of looking into oneself for norms for all humanity but life is a continual awakening to the new possibilities and new graces that are realized.<sup>7</sup>

There is, however, a false note in the description of Christian existence that I am presenting. Experience

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<sup>7</sup>Shinn, op. cit., pp. 177-178.

does not always coincide with theory. It is self-evident that the world has classical and secular humanist, Marxist and existentialist humanist who live life as though it were a response to a gracious gift. On the other hand, there are Christians of all types "who live in arrogance over their virtue or in crabbed obedience to unpleasant duty."<sup>8</sup>

The Christian must respond to such reality by realizing that men freely respond to the grace of God, and we all have the option of making a mess of it. The Christian also should realize that the divine grace that was met in Christ has the power to work among men who do not know about Jesus or believe in him. Man cannot dictate the way in which the Spirit operates, for He blows where He will (John 3:8).<sup>9</sup>

However, to renounce the pride of exclusiveness as held by some of our forefathers is not to say that the Christian faith really does not matter, for in Jesus Christ men have seen a new revelation of divine love and human possibilities.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

I believe I can sum up the issue between Fromm and Christianity by quoting two short phrases, one from Erich Fromm and the other by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Both reach to the core of man's nature by responding to man's experience of alienation and isolation. For in Christ, to live for others is in some profound way to also realize oneself which is what Fromm is after. There is a difference, however, in the approach to the way in which man lives life freely and in love. Fromm's approach to life is summed up in his phrase "man for himself." The Christian approach has been well spoken by Bonhoeffer: "the man for others."<sup>11</sup>

It must be greatly emphasized, however, that Fromm no less than Christianity insist that the heart of ethics is love. The man Fromm is talking about being for himself is not man as an individual but universal man. Therefore, Fromm and Christianity are not opposed in great hostility, but they are not a happy and easily related combination either. And yet, they both approach the core of the issue of human nature. Both see man's desperate need for freedom and union. Both realize men must live in loving communion;

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

if there is to be full life it cannot be lived alone. Both recognize and admit good and bad in man's self-desire. Christianity is aware of the importance of the human loves, and is indebted to Fromm for his brilliant description of these loves.

The fundamental difference? Fromm believes man must be for himself if he is to face life without false security and thus be able to find true union with others, nature, and himself. In doing this, Fromm believes man enjoys full, meaningful life. The Christian believes that love is the key that brings man a free obedience and an obedience that frees. Man does not live fully by making a concentrated and resourceful effort to be himself, but by celebrating the gift of life and freedom. Such a celebration results in communion with God and men.

I choose the Christian understanding of reality. John Cobb, Jr. gives a brief but excellent summary of why I make such a choice:

The reason for being a Christian is not that one necessarily is or ought to be religious and that Christianity is the best religion. The argument must be rather that Christianity is truer to reality

and/or that it more adequately illumines and fulfills  
man's ultimate needs, both as an individual and social  
being.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Cobb, op. cit., p. 116.

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